Aspects of Early Buddhist Sociological Thought

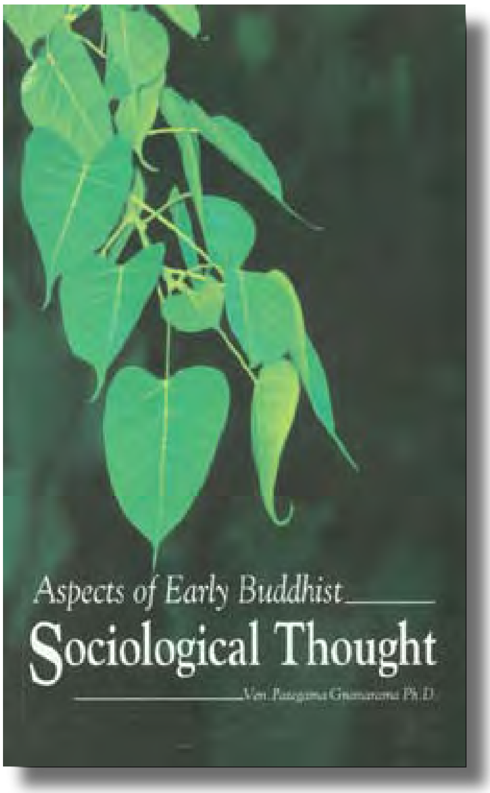
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Aspects of Early Buddhist Sociological Thought

Ven. Pategama Gnanarama Ph.D.



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Aspects of Early Buddhist Sociological Thought

"Particularly the chapters on the Buddhist attitude to aesthetics and on symbology in which the venerable author's interpretations are worth being considered at the highest scholarly level. There is no doubt that the few pages devoted there tend to promote the studies so far pursued on the subject."

Prof. V. Vitharana
Ph.D. (Ceylon), Ph.D. (London)
Lecturer in Cultural Anthropology
Sri Jayawardhanapura University
Sri Lanka

"Early Buddhist redefinition of woman's social role is well documented and discussed, shedding light on the subject, so it can be viewed in a broader perspective."

Senarat Wijavasundara
Lecturer in Philosophy
Buddhist and Pali College of Singapore

"All the chapters are enlightening and sociologically important. Particularly the discussion on Dhamma, medicine and sociology deserves special praise, for the novel and refreshing interpretation offered."

Prof. Chandima Wijebandara
Ph.D. (Lancaster)
Professor of Buddhist Studies
Sri Jayawardhanapura University
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Introduction

The present work is to be considered as a complementary volume to my earlier work, “An Approach to Buddhist Social Philosophy” published two years ago. The readers as well as the learned writers who reviewed it encouraged me stressing the fact that titles on the sociologist aspects of early Buddhism is still a desideratum and to write more on the sociological thought found in early Buddhist texts. Particularly Prof. Nandasena Ratnapala’s constant encouragement and the words of appreciation prompted me to compile the present work.

The last chapter of this book, “Woman’s Social Role Redefined” was written on the persuasion of Prof. Chandima Wijebandara and Viriyānandā who wanted me to document the Buddhist attitude to women in general. In order to substantiate the fact that the Buddhist attitude to women should have to be judged in relation to Indian society of two thousand five hundred years ago, I tried to be a little analytical and comparative in my approach. The chapter however, should be considered as an addendum to the setting up of the *Bhikkhuni* order and position of women discussed in the 7th chapter of my earlier work, “The Mission Accomplished”.

As the sub-headings are given with regard to every chapter, compiling an index was considered superfluous and avoided.

Pategama Gnanarama Thera

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Foreword

I consider it a great privilege and pleasure to be able to write an introduction to Ven. Dr. Pategama Gnanarama's interesting study on "Aspects of Early Buddhist Sociological Thought." Sociology is a discipline through which Buddhism could be gainfully looked at. Ven. Dr. Gnanarama, with his erudite knowledge of Buddhism and formal training in Philosophy endeavours to look at early Buddhist Sociological Thought. He starts with an apt definition of early Buddhism in the perspective of various philosophies. Anyone with even a scant knowledge of religion of philosophy could profit from this early chapter. It prepares him for what is to be followed in the rest of the book.

In the second part, Buddhism and Buddhist teachings are looked at from the perspective of medicine. What do Buddhist teachings say on illness and health? Health for example, is referred to as the greatest gain in life. There is much that Buddhist anthropology and sociology could gain from Buddhist thought. The social aspects of the community of monks are discussed from a sociological point of view as its theme. The code of medical ethics found in Buddhism is useful today in dealing with health and illness.

Buddhists hold the chanting of paritta in great respect. Is there a psychological and sociological basis in the chanting of paritta? What can be gained by the chanting of Buddhist discourses? The meaning of loving kindness and

its place in such paritta chanting is gracefully explained.

There are some, who even today, look at Buddhism as a pessimistic religion. They little realise the importance attached to aesthetics in Buddhist teachings. The beauty of melody in music and poetry too is emphasised. Buddhism appreciates music and poetry. It has no pessimism about it.

As far as I am concerned, I am fascinated by the chapter on socialization for death. Death is but a normal incident in Buddhist life. Since every component thing is subject to decay, birth has to end in death. Buddhist teachings provide a socialization for death, and Dr. Gnanarama describes it. No one prior to him, known to me has dealt with the socialization for death as found in Buddhism in this manner today. Sociologists are interested in the sociology of death, and a study of this nature throws much light on modern findings. I only hope that either the author or any other scholar would pursue this subject (i.e. how Buddhism confronts death) in future studies.

I congratulate the learned Thero on the magnificent contribution. I hope that he would derive inspiration from the response to his work and devote time for further research for this kind. The world needs to know the teachings of Buddhism, and such teachings need to be explained in a perspective that the world understands. May time and karma provide enough opportunities for this scholar monk to give the world many more fruits of his research.

Nandasena Ratnapala

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Sri Lanka

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- To Ven. Welipitiye Ratnasiri and Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association for providing me every facility at their disposal in order to continue my religious and educational activities in Singapore.

Pategama Gnanarama Thera

Abbreviations

A.	Aṅguttara Nikāya
AA.	Aṅguttara Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā, i.e. Manorathapūraṇi
D.	Dīgha Nikāya
DA.	Dīgha Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā, i.e. Sumaṅgalavilāsinī
DB	Dialogues of The Buddha
Dhp.	Dhammapada
DhpA.	Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā
DPPN.	Dictionary of Pali Proper Names
It.	Itivuttaka
Khp.	Khuddakapātha
KhpA.	Khuddakapātha Aṭṭhakathā
M.	Majjhima Nikāya
MA.	Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā, i.e. Papañcasūdani
Mil.	Milindapañha
MLS	Middle Length Saying
PTS.	Pali Text Society
S.	Saṃyutta Nikāya
SA.	Saṃyutta Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā, i.e. Sāratthappakāsini
Sn.	Suttanipāta
SnA.	Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā, i.e. paramattha-jotikā
Thg.I	Theragāthā
Thg.II	Therigāthā
Ud.	Udāna
UdA.	Udāna Aṭṭhakathā i.e. paramatthadīpani
Vin.	Vinaya
VinA.	Vinaya Aṭṭhakathā Samantapāsādikā
Vis.	Visuddhimagga Tr. Path of Purification, by Ven. Ñānamoli.

Complexity of Nature Defies Positive Answers

"If we ask for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say 'no'; if we ask whether the electron's position changes with time, we must say 'no'; if we ask whether the electron is at rest, we must say 'no'; if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say 'no'. The Buddha has given such answers when interrogated as to the condition of man's self after death; but they are not familiar answers for the tradition of seventeenth and eighteenth-century science".

– J. Robert Oppenheimer – *Science and the Common Understanding,* p, 40

Simon and Schuster, New York 1953

1. Towards a Definition of Early Buddhism

Buddhism has a long history of twenty-five centuries. Throughout its history, the lives of many nations in Asia have been modelled by Buddhism. It has survived the test of time as a living religion founded on an ethico-philosophical basis, ennobling the emotional aspect of the follower while widening the boundaries of his reason and intellect.

During the time of Asoka, the emperor of India (3rd century B.C.), it travelled even to the Western World along the trade routes prevailing at the time and within a few centuries after the demise of the Buddha, it spread over and became the dominant religion of almost the whole of Asia. It has been suggested that it made an impact on Western religious thought that came into being after the spread of Buddhism. Now we know, unlike some of the religions and philosophies in India, it flourished beyond the territorial boundaries of the Indian subcontinent and within a few centuries after its propagation by its founder Gotama the Buddha, it spread far and wide and came to be recognised as a world religion.

What are the salient features of Buddhism? Although it disappeared subsequently from the land of its birth due to some internal as well as external reasons, what were the contributory factors that facilitated its onward march? What were the expectations in the minds of the followers, keen in adhering to its norms? What were the innate qualities in the Buddhist teaching that convinced them to accept it? What novel features of the teaching induced

them to embrace and practise it with vigour and strength? In this context, let us examine in brief what those characteristics of Buddhism are.

Sometimes, it is asked whether the word 'religion' could be applied to Buddhism because the teaching of the Buddha is devoid of the fundamental characteristics found in other world religions. It may not be a religion, strictly in the sense in which that word is understood today, for it is not a system of faith, having prayer, worship and surrender expressing absolute allegiance to a supernatural Almighty God. Consequently, the concept of creation is not found in Buddhism. Moreover, heaven and hell marked with eternal bliss and suffering respectively and the assumption of a permanent monistic entity or soul, subsisting as a microcosmic substance in each and every individual, are not advocated in the teaching of the Buddha. If it is so, how far is it correct to denote Buddhism by the term 'religion' which has been commonly used to designate the faiths dominated by monotheism and monism? The problem arises as to how we should name a system of belief and practice that portrays the view of an atheist who neither accepts God nor Soul. Apparently, there is a growing tendency all over the world to question the validity of the stories of genesis involving creation. For instance, it is said that although America is predominantly a Christian country, there are in America 23 million atheists, 1,186,000 agnostics and 29,000 humanists from their own admission.

As numerous attempts have been made to define religion in etymological, historical, psychological as well as prescriptive terms, let us first examine these definitions to understand how far they delineate Buddhism's stance as a religion.

Etymological Definitions of Religion

Etymological definitions are more or less conjectural, because the origin of the word is shrouded in uncertainty. Therefore historically, untenable. On the other hand, they provide us only with the starting concept of the word 'religion', which is also mostly hypothetical. However from very early times, different views have been expressed in regard to its etymological import.

In Latin it was spelt 'rel(l)igio' and the Roman writer Cicero derived the word from the root 'leg' meaning 'to take up', 'gather', 'count' or 'observe'. Hence, according to him, religion is an observation of the signs of a Divine Communication or to read the omens. Servius, on the other hard, derived it from the root 'lig' to bind. So he interpreted the word to mean a communion between the human and the superhuman.

On the basis of the etymological meanings stated above, A.C. Bouquet concludes: "for most Europeans, at any rate, 'religion' has come to mean a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity, the Sacred, Supernatural, the Self-Existent, the Absolute or simply God".[1] Obviously, according to the etymological definitions, Buddhism cannot be called a religion because it lacks the necessary constituents specified in the definitions.

Historical Definitions of Religion

Historical definitions of religion tend to supply us with historical and biographical data pertaining to the word, thereby portraying the role it played in history, hence they do not exhaust the particular significance of a given religion. This type of definition sometimes magnifies the shortcomings

[1] Bouquet A.C. ~ *Comparative Religion* p.12 (Penguin).

discernible in religious practices which the founders of religions never approved of. Perhaps, these definitions would reveal to us how a religion could forge ahead throughout the ages, due to historical circumstances.

The famous quotation from Karl Marx could be assigned to this category of definition. For he defines religion as "the sob of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, the spirit of conditions utterly unspiritual. It is the opium of the poor". Engels too defined religion in the same vein. For he says: "Religion is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their early life". To Voltaire it is "an absurdity to keep the multitudes in subjugation".

Lenin, moreover elaborating on the theme of the definitions, further said that "religion taught those who toiled in poverty all their lives to be resigned and patient in this world and consoled them with the hope of reward in heaven, because it was an opiate of the people, a sort of spiritual vodka meant to make them the slaves of capitalism".[2] Jonathan Swift turned to European history and satirically said: "We have just enough religion to make us hate but not enough to make us love one another."[3]

The history of a religion sometimes is characterised by subjugation, terror and persecution. From the 11th century to the 13th century, no less than eight wars called 'Crusades' were waged to liberate Jerusalem from Muslim domination. The series of military expeditions led by the Western European countries, France, Germany, Italy and England, ultimately gained nothing by their martial efforts save the loss of resources and human lives.

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2 Wijewardhana D.C. ~ *Revolt in the Temple* p.544 (Colombo).

3 *Pocket Book of Quotations* p.312 (New York).

Nonetheless, as history reveals, they strengthened the power and prestige of the papacy, building up city states in Italy by increasing Eastern trade. When religion is defined in historical terms, the devastating role played by religion in European history was very much in the minds of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Voltaire and Swift.

Psychological Definitions of Religion

Psychologically, the idea of dependence upon a Supreme Controlling Power comes into being as a result of man's inability to exert his physical as well as psychical strength. The assumption that there is a powerful hand governing the destinies of man and the universe, truly necessitates surrender and dependence. Webster's new Universal Dictionary of the English Language defines the word in this vein and states that religion is the "recognition on the part of man, of a controlling superhuman power entitled to obedience, reverence and worship. The feeling or the spiritual attitude of those recognising such a controlling power". Herein, a psychological twist is clearly seen, an attempt to define religion as a creation of man's psyche. This dogmatic view however tempted the German philosopher Hegel to say that if the consciousness of dependence constituted religion, a dog would be more religious!

Jung and Freud too, looked at religion from a psychological perspective and seemed to have analysed the psychological function of religion in relation to human civilisation. While Jung defined religion as the sublimation of the incestuous libido, to Freud the beginnings of religion, ethics, society and art met in the Oedipus complex.[4]

[4] Wijewardhana D.C. ~ *Revolt in the Temple* p.545 (Colombo).

Prescriptive Definitions of Religion

The prescriptive definitions are stipulative and tend to regulate and tell us what religion should be and not what it really is. Certainly, while the concept of a controlling power is manifested in these definitions, religious conduct and morality are defined, thereby governing the behavioural pattern of the believer. In this connection, the definition of religion given in the Oxford Dictionary could be cited, according to which a religion is a "system of faith and worship; human recognition of superhuman controlling power and specially of a personal god entitled to obedience, effect of such on conduct etc".

The Chambers 20th Century Dictionary defines religion more or less along the same lines and says: "Religion is a belief in, recognition of or an awakened sense of a higher unseen controlling power or powers with the emotion and morality connected therewith." The self-same theistic approach is found in the definition of St. Thomas Aquinas too. He says that it is goodness rendering in God, the honour due to Him. It is considered that man's expression of his acknowledgment of the Divine and his moral consciousness are denoted by the word 'religion'.

As prescriptively defined, religion is a belief involving an unseen power supreme, which though determines us, we are incapable of determining it in turn. Therefore when the teaching of the Buddha is taken as a whole, these definitions, either being too narrow or theistically oriented, have no bearing whatsoever on Buddhism.

Is Buddhism a Philosophy?

Now, we come to the next question asked in regard to Buddhism. If it is not a religion in the popular usage of

the term, it is asked whether Buddhism is a philosophy. Etymologically, philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom and hence, philosophy is defined as seeking wisdom, as well as wisdom sought. The meaning was later extended to include the basic principles of a given subject. Thus, the extended meaning came to indicate the systematised principles of any subject or any branch of knowledge.

Bertrand Russell, describing the field of philosophy, says that to a great extent the uncertainty of philosophy is more apparent than real and continues to characterise the nature of philosophy thus: "Those questions which are already capable of definite answers were placed in the sciences, while those only to which at present no definite answer can be given remain to form the residue which is called philosophy."[5] However it must be emphasised that Buddhism is not a speculative philosophy. It is pragmatic and rational and it points out a way of life.

Traditionally, Western Philosophy is considered to have been composed of five branches of study: Metaphysics, Ethics, Aesthetics, Epistemology and Logic. Metaphysics, having two subdivisions, ontology and cosmology, deals with first principles and is quite external to the Buddhist approach to reality. The word 'metaphysics' is made up of two Greek words 'meta' and 'physika' (after the physical) and is concerned with ultimate causes following a method quite different to the Buddhist approach to reality. Philosophically speaking, the *Abhidhamma* is an analysis and synthesis of the canonical material on mind and matter, involving a complex and intricate methodology. Although some scholars like to call it 'Buddhist metaphysics', it does not deal with metaphysical substances as found in metaphysics

[5] Russell, Bertrand ~ *Problems of Philosophy* p.90 (London).

introduced by Aristotle. Ontology, being a study of the nature of being and existence in the abstract, is concerned with the essence while cosmology deals with the universal order. Although there are some ontological and cosmological references in Buddhist scriptures, but being supplementary to the main thesis, they are of much less significance in understanding the Buddhist standpoint. There is of course, no question concerning the place of ethics in Buddhism, for it dominates the entire gamut of the Buddha's teaching. As could be understood from numerous scriptural references, Buddhism has an aesthetic view of its own. When Buddhism is taken in its entirety, it is explanable as a theory of knowledge. As Buddhism is epistemologically oriented, it paves the way for the elimination of ignorance *(avijjā)* thereby ensuring individual's enlightenment. As regards logic, just as much as in science, Buddhism is more inclined to induction and at a somewhat higher level prefers dialectics.

The diverse trends of contemporary Western Philosophy such as realism, empiricism, idealism, positivism, existentialism, pragmatism etc. are certainly not difficult to find in Buddhism. But Buddhism is not a philosophy for philosophy's sake. It "produces knowledge which leads to serenity, Higher Knowledge, Full Enlightenment and Nibbāna" *(abhiññāya saṃbodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati).* And elsewhere it is said that the doctrine "practised, made much of, leads to Higher Knowledge, Full Enlightenment and Nibbāna"

(Bhāvito bahulīkato abhiññāya
sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati).

The rational approach and the utilitarian nature of the philosophy behind the Path shown by the Buddha however cannot be underestimated. George Grimm, who wrote a book on Buddhism as far back as 1926, (although it contains some misconceptions) named the book "The Doctrine of the Buddha–The Religion of Reason."[6]

Is Buddhism a Science?

It will be useful for us to examine in the present context the relationship Buddhism has with science. Broadly speaking, science deals with facts and principles gained by systematic study. The technique employed to define a problem, to gather and draft data and test hypotheses empirically is called scientific method. Although science is devoid of transcendental concerns, some religious sociologists tend to believe that science is a kind of discipline having a functional equivalent to religion.

Within these confines, it is not difficult to draw an affinity between science and Buddhism. As the teaching of the Buddha is verifiable empirically, just as scientific truth, and also because of the application of scientific methodology, Buddhism can be called rational and scientific. But it can never be compared to physical science. It is neither a kind of physics that deals with the laws, properties and interactions of matter, motion and energy, nor a kind of chemistry which investigates the composition and interaction of existing compounds and elements and produces new chemicals by synthesising natural and artificial compounds. But, on the contrary, if the skill resulting

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6 Grimm, George ~ *The Doctrine of the Buddha: The Religion of Reason.* The book was first published in Germany. He asserts that he is dealing with the earliest form of Buddhism.

from training given in conformity with a particular religion could be called Christian Science or Islamic Science we can speak of a Buddhist Science rooted in Buddhism and the training pursued on Buddhist principles.

As the world we live in today is dominated by science and technology in many respects, science has been elevated to a higher position and understood as a quasi-religion. Because at least in principle, it is capable of, as they say, unravelling the mysteries of life, the universe and the nature of reality. They strongly believe, that science is forging ahead and in time to come, it will be capable of disclosing all the secrets of the meaning of human life. Within this conceptual setting, science has been clothed in religious garb. Nevertheless, science is, more or less, a religion of scepticism. Truly, human kind has benefitted in many ways by scientific achievements. Science uses hardware and software measurements in order to measure complex phenomena, which were considered immeasurable a few decades ago, and widens our mental horizon, but it shows no interest in the vital problems that religion professes to solve.

Science is neither moral nor immoral; it is amoral. Religion on the other hand, has definite bearings on moral values. Science is still exploring the unexplored and keeps on challenging its own findings. It is well known how the Quantum Theory of Planck and Relativity Theory of Einstein challenged the dimensions of physics. Scientific presumptions that the world is essentially objective, material; things that we can measure objectively being the only things worth investigation, are being challenged by a new generation of scientists and now, therefore, a new view of science is being forwarded by them. It is called New Science or

Postmodern Science. Perhaps, this could be considered as an attempt to exonerate scientists from their 'tunnel view' of the world. What is recommended in Buddhism too, is not 'view', which is considered partial; but 'vision' *(diṭṭhim ca anupagamma dassanena sampanno).*

Does Religion Differ from Person to Person?

It is sometimes argued that everyone has a religion particular to himself. That is to say, a person may adhere to a world view particular to himself, conceived from his own point of view. Therefore, a person professing any of the world religions may not accept what is taught in that religion *in toto,* but he may accept some of the tenets appealing to his own temperament and reason. Yet another, while considering the existing religions as institutionalised dogmas, may reject them all and hold a totally different world view, basing his arguments on science. In this way, since that which has a powerful hold on a person may render him to accept that which is empirical and scientific, he may claim that his religion *is* science.

This kind of unilateral pseudo-religious attitude cultivated in relation to science would not serve any purpose in finding out a therapeutic solution to the predicament of humanity.

Natural and Ethical Religions

There is yet another division of religion called Natural and Ethical.[7] Natural Religions were primitive and tribal. The religious values regarded in esteem in primitive societies were those that fulfilled the daily needs of the community.

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7 Wright, William Kelly–*A Student's Philosophy of Religion* p.5 (London).

Religion, being accompanied with rites and rituals, focused on getting the aspirations of the tribe accomplished rather than spiritual needs of the individual. A phase of this religion is seen in the religion of the Vedas in ancient India; the earliest religion in the world having scriptural evidence.

As revealed in the Rig Veda, Vedic polytheism centred mainly on four objectives considered to have had a strong impact on the community life of Vedic Aryans. Very often than not, the aspirations recorded are:

1. Heroic Sons
2. Long life
3. Wealth in the form of cattle
4. Victory in battle

Hymns were chanted and numerous sacrifices were made to satisfy the gods of the Vedic pantheon, in order to get one or the other of these wishes fulfilled.

All the world religions are collectively called Ethical Religions in contradistinction to Natural Religions of primitive societies. Although Vedic religion is not branded primitive as such, still the tribal or the racial values are seen transferred to religious values. Ethical Religions, being primarily religions of redemption, encourage ethical and moral conduct in the devotee. When we take into consideration all the major religions existing in the world today, whether theistic or atheistic, they devote themselves to carrying out systematic ways and means of their own for the conservation and enhancement of ethical values, in which sense Buddhism has also handed down a set of moral values. By adhering to them, the welfare of society and the individual is ensured.

Religion as a Six-Dimensional Organism

Primarily, Buddhism is not a form of worship, but with the passage of time, it did evolve into a form of worship thereby fulfilling the psychological requirements of the populace. The process of assimilation was at work and in its historical march, interactions of the religions that were in the land of its birth, and the religions and cults flourishing in the lands where Buddhism spread, shared their common religious heritages with Buddhism. A religion grows while living. Because of this growing tendency, Ninian Smart compares religion to a six-dimensional organism, for it consists of six essentials, viz; doctrine, myths, ethics, rituals, ecclesiastical bodies and followers.[8]

Buddhism too, during its long history of little over two and a half millennia, has undergone numerous changes and it has been institutionalised in conformity with the national cultures of the lands where it spread. Nevertheless, the original message of the Buddha, which is called Early Buddhism, still can be recognised with certainty even today.

Is there a Uniformity in Religions?

Because of the ethical character of world religions, a notion is being highlighted that all religions are more or less the same, and though they are apparently individual, in a collective sense they transmit a common message without much difference. The motive underlying all religions is aimed at the same identical goal. This seems to be an idea conceived in the minds of those who have no regard for the doctrinal issues of any of the religions. According to them

8 See *Religious Experience of Mankind* by Ninian Smart (London).

religious diversity is a mere labelling with an underlying uniformity of purpose.

The ethics of every religion is based on its individual doctrinal principles. Nobody, therefore, serious about his own system of faith, would ever take this misinterpretation seriously. Do they who forward the concept of uniformity of all religions hope to effect religious harmony and religious tolerance by this means? Or are they exploiting a mere superficial similarity for the fulfilment of their own personal ends? Can there possibly be harmonious living where religious and racial prejudices have gone to the extreme of killing each other? Certainly, depravity of critical examination would not lead us to a proper evaluation and apprehension of religions. *Peaceful co-existence is nurtured only within the framework of mutual respect and understanding,* but not within the citadel of dogmatism and irrationality.

Religions which originated around the Middle East, Judaism (13th c.B.C.), Zoroastrianism (7th c.B.C.), Christianity (15th c.A.D.), Islam (7th c.A.D.) and Bahaism (19th c.A.D.) are fundamentally monotheistic, but preach different codes of conduct. Hinduism which evolved out of ancient Brahmanism (about 3rd millennium B.C.) in the Indian subcontinent, is multi-faceted. Beginning from polytheism cum (kat) henotheism and with a somewhat pantheistic colouring, it underwent phases of monism and monotheism. Jainism and Buddhism (6th c.B.C.) give precedence to ethical conduct and reverence of life. But, Buddhism rejecting revelation, monism and theism altogether, accepts some of the other Indian religious and philosophical heritages with certain modifications and innovative additions as corrective supplements. Sikhism (16th c.A.D.) has been developed on elements borrowed from Hinduism and Islam with a

particular national identity.

Shintoism (3rd millennium B.C.), considered to have evolved out of ancestor worship in ancient Japan, believes in the divinity of the Emperor and adheres to the worship of family ancestors and national heros.

Taoism in China, (6th c.B.C.) speaks of Tao as the universal force of harmonising nature, with an emphasis on contemplation. Later in history, it developed into a pantheistic religion of hero worship with magical and mystical rites. Confucianism (6th c.B.C.) which exerted a greater influence on Chinese life, advocated benevolence, love, righteousness, decorum, sincerity, wise leadership and encouraged good management of family and society. But later, the ideals were superseded by theistic and ritualistic elements.

Does not the saying that all religions preach one and the same thing amount to hypocrisy? Could we ignore or belittle the contributions of Moses, Zarathustra, Mahavira, Buddha, Lao-tze, Confucius, Christ, Mohammed, Guru Nanak and Bah'ulla for the dignity of human civilisation? Is it not a denial of justice to the vast amount of religious literature produced by numerous commentators and expositors? The diversity of religions is a fact too real to be ignored. Although they sprang up in the same cultural and social millieu Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam and Bahaism or Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, were either reformative or modificatory or innovative, having distinctive identities of their own.

What is necessary is the cultivation of respect for each other's religion. The democratic spirit of tolerating the views that are contradictory to one's own is the basic norm to be followed. Where there are friendly dialogue and exhibition of due respect for each other, certainly there will be

peace and coexistence. All over the world today there is violence and confrontation as a result of discrimination kindled by racial, tribal, caste or religious prejudices. When democracy itself is confined to a mere slogan in the hands of power-mongers, proselytizing is devised in the guise of social service. Yet in some other instances superficial similarities are drawn to weaken the identity of a religious conviction. It is obvious that in the world today, race, tribe, caste or clan is exploited to acquire or maintain power. When they fail to kindle those prejudices for the achievement of desired ends, a different tune is played to preach the affinities of religious faiths.

A Qualitative Definition of Buddhism

Six qualities peculiar to the teachings of the Buddha are often quoted. Dhamma, the doctrine, is well-proclaimed *(svākkhāta)*, because it is lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at the ending. It is related to this very life of the individual *(sandiṭṭhika)*. It transcends limitations of time and yields results here and now *(akālika)*. Certainly, the problems discussed in Buddhism are human situations perennially facing humankind. It is open to all and free from esoterism *(ehipassika)* because it is not imparted to a selected few, but freely and equally available to all irrespective of their birth and social status. It leads to the annihilation of suffering *(opanayika)*. It has to be realised individually by the wise *(paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhī)*.[9]

An Ethical Definition of Buddhism

Ethically speaking Buddhism is a way of life. One should shun all that is evil which is retributive and brings about

9 *D.* ii, p.217. iii; p.227; *A.* i, p.158

suffering. On the positive side, one must accumulate merits by resorting to what is morally good and wholesome which results in happiness. But, merits alone will not fulfil the final objective: emancipation from suffering. It is concentration and insight through mind culture that leads to emancipation. Viewed from an ethical perspective, Buddhism as a religion gives precedence to morality and mind culture and thus reveals its predominantly ethical and pragmatic nature. Therefore, Buddhism in its entirety has been defined as a system of ethics. Referring to the teaching of the Buddhas, the *Dhammapada* summarises the doctrine:

“Abstention from all evil
Accumulation of wholesome deeds
Restraint of one’s mind
This is the teaching of the Buddhas”

“Sabba pāpassa akaraṇaṃ
Kusalassa upasampadā
Sacitta pariyodapanaṃ
Etaṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ”[10]

Buddhism Doctrinally Defined

By the fifth of the first five disciples of the Buddha, Buddhism has been defined in relation to a basic tenet found in the Teaching. Philosophically, it is considered as one of the best and precise definitions of Buddhism. Upatissa, who was later known as Sariputta, one of the two chief disciples of the Buddha, questioned Assaji as to who was Assaji’s teacher and what his doctrine was. He replied that his Teacher was Gotama the Buddha and summarised the Teaching characterising the theory of causality

10 *Dhp.* 183

as taught by the Buddha. Assaji's summarised version of Buddhism more or less looks like an ontological outline, as it were, of Buddhism. The early disciples seemed to have been attracted by the philosophical world view on which the Teaching of the Buddha was based. Assaji, though just a new convert, however, promptly uttered a four line stanza to bring out the deep philosophical outlook of the Buddha's teaching which dealt with causality.

"Of things that proceed from a cause
Their cause the Tathagata has told
And also their cessation
Thus teaches the Great Ascetic"

"Ye dhammā hetuppabhav
tesaṃ hetu tathāgato āha
yesaṃ ca yo nirodho
evaṃ vādi mahasamaṇo"[11]

The stanza precisely presents one of the most fundamental doctrines of the Buddha's teaching, which Assaji presumably thought to be an innovation in the field of religious philosophies at the time.

Buddhism preserves its identity as a religion of mankind yet takes a course different from other religions. As it contrasts with diverse theories and 'isms' in analysing and remedying the predicament of humankind, it is plausible to examine what Buddhism is *not* among other theories and 'isms' enunciated by numerous religious groups at the time. By rejecting both theses and anti-theses with reference to different ideologies, the Buddha maintained the middle position in unraveling the Truth. Therefore Buddhism is a middle course, a *via media;* pragmatic and innovative in its

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11 *Vin.* i, p.40

own right. Parallel concepts mutually opposing each other have been mentioned in the canonical scriptures in this connection to show that extreme views would not delineate the real state of affairs related to the mundane and supra-mundane.

Pure Hedonism and Strict Asceticism

In the very first sermon of the Buddha, the Turning of the Wheel of Law, the Buddha proclaimed that the path discovered by Him is the Middle Path which avoids two extremes: pure hedonism amounting to self-indulgence *(kāmasukhallikānuyoga)* and strict asceticism *(attakilamathānuyoga)* advocating austere penance as a means of achieving the religious goal. The former is characterised as low *(hino),* vulgar *(gammo),* and resorted to by ordinary worldlings *(pothujjaniko),* ignoble *(anariyo),* and useless *(anatthasaṃhito).* The latter has been introduced as painful *(dukkho),* ignoble *(anariyo),* and useless *(anatthasaṃhito).*[12]

Here what is noticeable is, while hedonism has been introduced with five adjectives, asceticism has been described only with three. A hedonist who clings to a nihilistic view of life rejects moral responsibility altogether and may seek pleasure with whatever possible means at his disposal. Perhaps this may be the reason for denouncing their viewpoint with much more emphasis. These parallel views are diametrically opposite to each other and hinge on two fundamental philosophical concepts: nihilism *(ucchedavāda)* and eternalism *(sassatavāda).* In the *Brahmajāla-sutra,* the Buddha gives a synopsis of these two philosophical systems synthesising the seven nihilistic

[12] *Vin.* i, pp.10ff.

views into one category and the fifty-five eternalistic views into the other.[13] Strict asceticism of self-denial was based on eternalism and the belief in a soul. Nihilism, on the other hand, professed that the soul is only a psychophysical phenomenon and that it does not survive death, but perishes at death without any residue left behind to be born again. The austere asceticism of adhering to mere rules and rituals *(silabbataparāmāsa)* as a means of spiritual development is also considered a fetter *(saṃyojana),* an obstacle on the way to perfection just as much as the clinging to the belief of a soul *(sakkāya diṭṭhi).*[14]

Monotheism and Accidentalism

The Buddha was specific in refuting the theory of creation which traces the genesis of the world to an omnipotent, omniscient and allcompassionate monotheistic god *(issara nimmānavāda).* The place attributed to *Brahma* as the god of creation has been challenged in many of the discourses and the theory has been laid bare as groundless. It has been shown that the concept of a first cause *(ādi kāraṇa)* is based on wrong understanding. In the same vein, accidentalism *(adhicca-samuppannavāda)* which advocates pure chance for all happenings has been rejected as not complementary to one's striving for realisation.[15]

Kammic Determinism and Fatalism

Buddhism outrightly refutes the view that every happening that one faces is kammically determined *(sabbaṃ pubbekatahetuvāda).* Kamma or retributive action being a

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[13] *D.* i, p.46

[14] *A.* iv, p.67; p.68; *D.* i, p.33

[15] *A.* i, p.173

complicated issue, occupies only one-fifth of the five kinds of happenings: physical, biological, kammic, psychological and natural.[16]

If it is not kamma, is it the 'moving finger' of providence or fate that keeps on writing the destiny of everyone and everything? Buddhism does not attribute any happening to fatalism, the imaginary cause beyond human control believed to have a decisive influence over human lives. During the Buddha's time Makkhali Gosala preached the deterministic theory of fatalism and claimed that everything takes place as predestined. These two views reduced the individual to a robot acting on pre-fed data. Possibly these parallel views of kammic determinism and fatalism *(niyati samgativāda)* were dismissed on the ground that they undermine free will and responsibility, leading one to non-action *(akiriyavāda).*

Monism and Pluralism

The concept that all phenomena evolved out of a monistic neuter principle is as old as the Vedic period. In the course of time it took a different turn in the hands of speculative Upanishadic philosophers who identified it as *brahman* and *atman.* Brahman is the macrocosmic soul which manifests itself in every animate and inanimate thing as a microcosmic entity *(ātman).* Macrocosm creates, sustains and receives everything back into itself. Individual souls are immutable, unborn, permanent, eternal, ancient and cannot be killed even when the body is destroyed. It is the manikin or the 'man in man' which survives death.

The monistic view *(sabbaṃ ekattaṃ)* which dominated every field of Indian thought as the pivotal concept

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16 *D.* i, pp.53 ff.

has been rejected in Buddhism on two premises.[17] One is the impermanency and unsatisfactoriness of empirical existence. The argument is very well illustrated in the *Anattalakkhaṇa-sutta,* the second discourse of the Buddha after Enlightenment.[18] The other premise is the analysis of the individual into constituent parts to show that there is no permanent entity or substantiality whatsoever. This is found in many places in the canon where the individual is analysed into (i) two *(nāmarūpa)* (ii) five *(pañcakkhanda)* (iii) six *(cha dhātu)* (iv) twelve *(dvādasa āyatana)* and (v) eighteen *(aṭṭhārasa dhātu)* factors.

The concept of a union with the macrocosm has been shown to be as ridiculous as the act of a man who builds a staircase to climb a mansion whose location is not known.[19]

By reason of the refutation of the universal soul, its dualistic manifestation as mind and matter does not arise. But the question of pluralism *(sabbaṃ puthuttaṃ)* has been put to the Buddha to know whether everything can be attributed to the result of diverse individual entities. The Buddha rejected that hypothesis too, just as much as he rejected monism.[20]

Absolute Realism and Absolute Nothingness

As a philosophical proposition, realism is connected with Plato and Aristotle who believed in the existence of universal forms beyond our sense experience. The general terms that we use in our day-to-day life are nothing but denotations of these universal forms which exist somewhere as separate

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17 *S.* ii, p.77

18 *Vin.* i, pp.13–14

19 *D.* i, p.194

20 *S.* ii, p.77

entities. This line of reasoning on the existence of universal forms is called realism. Buddhism certainly does not contribute to this extremist view of Western philosophical thought. It explains existence on an empirical and factual basis corresponding to and in coherence with the facts. Hence Buddhism considers the theory of absolute realism *(sabbaṃ atthi)* as an extreme view as much as the view of absolute nothingness *(sabbaṃ natthi)*.[21] The philosophical jargon found in the concept of absolute nothingness may lead one to conceptualise in terms of non-dualism or monism as the later Indian non-dualist, Shankara, has done. He maintained every phenomenon as illusion *(māyā)*, a projection of the universal soul.

The Buddha avoided extremist views and taught the dhamma by *via media* which is nothing but conditionality or dependent origination. Evidently, the doctrinal analysis as well as the Path *(magga)* lie in between the extremes.

For a Correct Philosophy of Life

Buddhism teaches us to face the stark realities of life. As revealed in the First Noble Truth these realities which all of us have to encounter are categorised into three: physical, psychical and psycho-physical. All of them, rather than three independent realities by themselves, can be considered as three aspects of one individual unitary phenomenon of our existence.

In the very first discourse of the Buddha, "Turning of the Wheel of Law", the Buddha named it *'dukkha'* that has been rendered into English with quite a number of different words: ill, pain, suffering, sorrow and unsatisfactoriness. To a considerable extent, these renderings do

[21] *S.* ii, p.17, p.77

carry the numerous shades of meanings of the Pali term *'dukkha'.* It truly denotes and connotes in its sphere of analysis the very phenomenon of existence. The commentator, Buddhaghosa, in his "Path of Purification" breaks the word into two as *'du'* + *'kha'* and says: "The word 'du' (bad) is met within the sense of 'vile' *(kucchita);* for they call a vile child a *'duputta'* (bad child). The word *'khaṃ'* (–ness), however is met within the sense of 'empty' *(tuccha),* for they call empty space *'khaṃ'* and the First Truth is vile because it is the 'haunt of many dangers', and it is empty because it is devoid of the lastingness, beauty, pleasure and self conceived by rash people. So it is called *'dukkhaṃ'* (badness) = suffering, pain, because of vileness and emptiness".

However there are some writers, disturbed by the fact of *dukkha* being discussed as the First Noble Truth in Buddhism, incline to hold the wrong view that Buddhism is pessimistic in outlook from the very beginning.

What is pessimism? Pessimism is a gloomy view of life. A pessimist sees only the worst aspect of everything. He always anticipates defeat. Because of wrong notions he is afraid of facing the facts of life. Pessimism, being an inner check of free activity, overwhelms one with despair, frustration, inaction and inhibition. Contrary to the hopelessness which characterises pessimism, optimism offers a bright view of life full of hope. The optimist is locked up in a fool's paradise, in a utopia for the time being. When he realises the fact of *dukkha* which is woven into the very fabric of existence, he is disappointed and depressed. When we come face to face, not only with the world of experience, but also with our inner feelings, aspirations and proclivities, we are confronted with all sorts of problems.

The non-recognition of the stark realities of life is

indeed not a fact to be understood in the vicissitudes of life. Therefore Buddhism teaches us to understand things as they really are *(yathābhutā).* Since the Buddhist approach is neither pessimistic nor optimistic it advocates realism lying between those two extremes. Besides, Buddhism does not stop at analysing the constituents of *dukkha,* on the contrary it shows an antidote to overcome it.

The psychoanalyst, Freud, said that man is always suffering from an uncertainty, a fear expressed in terms of anxiety. This harrowing uneasiness of his mind overpowers his reason. The existentialist philosopher, Kierkegaard, emphasised man's fear that torments him when he is confronted with life's problems. He named it 'anguish' and declared that it can only be relieved by transcendental faith in God. But two other existentialists, Heideggar and Jean Paul Sartre, totally denying the existence of God, said the honest encounter with dread and anguish is the only gateway to 'authentic' living. Philosopher Kant was emphatic in stating that man is ever in a predicament. Yet nobody calls them pessimists.

In Buddhism the empiricist approach to *dukkha* is explained in Right Understanding *(Sammā Diṭṭhi),* the first constituent of the Path to realisation and liberation. The foremost position ascribed to understanding life's situations correctly is noteworthy in the Buddhist course of training. It helps the individual model his behaviour for the betterment of this life here and the life after.

The Pali term for Right Understanding is *'Sammā Diṭṭhi'.* *'Sammā'* is an adjective meaning 'right' or 'correct' or 'perfect'. *'Diṭṭhi'* is a derivative (from drs to see) meaning visual perception. But in this particular context it is not to be understood as a physical view perceived through the faculty

of the eye but as recognition, the understanding of the subjective and the objective worlds with our mind's eye.

The person who can differentiate right from wrong builds for himself a right philosophy of life. That philosophy, being based on correct evaluation not only of sense data but also one's emotions, inclinations and conceptual formations, would help the person concerned lead a meaningful life as a human being. Our perspective on life, crucial issues, values and judgments naturally have an impact upon all our activities. So, Right Understanding in governing our innate prejudices and attitudes plays a prominent role in orienting us in this life.

Therefore, understanding rightly is an intellectual exercise that helps us formulate a desirable, beneficial kind of philosophy of life and is considered a necessary prerequisite for the training envisaged in Buddhism. It is a factual understanding which helps us not only in our perception but also in our judgments and interpretations of values, translating them into action. So, in this way a correct philosophy of life restructures our ideational framework and contributes enormously to making our lives meaningful.

It is very important to find out why Right Understanding has been given such a prominent place in the Noble Eightfold Path. Obviously it throws a flood of light on the rest of the steps of the Path and plays a leading role in modeling the life of an individual by introducing an attitudinal change towards his lifestyle. This change is anticipated to be brought about by the employment of correct and factual understanding corresponding to Truth.

Because of self-centeredness, prejudices and predispositions haunt our minds veiling the true perspective of things. In actuality it is not because of clouded lenses

that we are not in a position to see things properly, but because of our clouded minds. Right Understanding conditions the rest of the steps of the Path: Right Concepts, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. The steps of the Path are not mutually exclusive. They, together, form a correct form of living. As the coordinating factor of the Path, Right Understanding which is nothing but a correct philosophy of life helps place the rest of the factors of the Path in proper, meaningful relationship.

Why Right Understanding?

Right Understanding is the first step of the Buddhist Path of eight constituent factors. The final objective of living a religious life is realised by eliminating ignorance *(avijjā)* which keeps on veiling right and perfect understanding. The last factor of the Path, Right Concentration *(Sammā Samādhi),* is characterised by Right Insight *(Sammā Ñāna)* and Right Release *(Sammā Vimutti)* which together culminate in total Perfection.

Since the Buddhist theory of knowledge begins with the rational evaluation of sense data leading one to destroy ignorance it is plausible to see how this process has been explained in Buddhism. Throughout one's pilgrimage to perfection, a rationality, a reasoning process is involved for the acquisition of Release, the apex of Wisdom.

Basically there are two factors contributory to Right Understanding; one is external while the other is internal. These two are technically introduced as *paratoghosa* and *yonisomanasikāra* without which, as Buddhism emphasises, no Right Understanding is possible. Literally the former means 'listening from others'. However it does not confine

its sphere to auditory perception of what others say and the resultant sensation alone. In the Buddhist context the term connotes a wider range of activity. It applies to visual, olfactory, gustatory and tactile sense data as well. Through the sense faculties we receive information from the outside world, but out of the five senses the eye and the ear play a dominant role in acquiring this diverse information.

Newspapers, books and other reading materials as well as radio, television and numerous media of mass communication which communicate information to us, can be considered as sources of information or *paratoghosa.* Therefore as an external factor of sense stimulation the term applies to the sum-total of the intelligence we acquire by reading, listening to the mass media and by personal intimation.

At present we live in a world of commercialism where the sale of anything and everything is carried out with the motive of gaining profit out of minimum investment. Persuasive advertisements and tempting propaganda are so common that the consumer is constantly being informed of the benefits of using this or that in this world of consumerism. With regard to whatever information that we obtain through our sense doors, according to the Buddhist point of view, it has to be thoroughly analysed and critically evaluated before approval, because the source of information under discussion *(paratoghosa)* is the most fundamental factor contributory to both Right Understanding *(Sammā Diṭṭhi)* and Wrong Understanding *(Micchā Diṭṭhi).* It provides us with food for thought. It tends to modify our behaviour and influence our lifestyle. Therefore this single factor can be an incentive either to be morally good or morally bad.

In this context, the Buddhist theory of. knowledge introduces the second most important factor *yonisomanasikāra.*

Etymologically the word means 'reflection by way of origin'. Therefore it has come to mean thoughtful reflection. While the former characterises the sources of information, the latter concept denotes the exercise of reason in differentiating what is good and wholesome with reference to what is seen and read, heard, smelt, tasted and touched through the sense faculties. The opposite *ayonisomanasikāra* or reasoning devoid of reflection inevitably leads to Wrong Understanding *(Micchā Diṭṭhi).* Therefore the Buddha categorically states that while sources of information and thoughtful reflection are the cause and condition *(hetu* and *paccaya)* for Right Understanding, sources of information and reasoning devoid of reflection are the cause and condition for Wrong Understanding.

The *Anguttara Nikāya* further reveals that lust arises on two conditions: perceiving attractive signs *(subha nimitta)* and unthoughtful reflection. In the same way, hatred or malice arises due to perceiving hateful signs *(patigha nimitta)* and unthoughtful reflection.[22] One is therefore advised to differentiate, reflect and reason out thoughtfully the moral implications of what is experienced by the senses. This clearly shows that our sense data have to be thoroughly subjected to the test of thoughtful reflection.

Our minds are very often than not preoccupied by some innate dispositions not amicable to the correct evaluation of things. They are prejudice *(chanda),* illwill *(dosa),* fear *(bhaya)* and ignorance *(moha).* Being motivated by one or the other of these mental tendencies, we are tempted to arrive at decisions which are inaccurate and harmful to oneself and society as a whole. It is because of these emotive tendencies that we resort to wrong courses of action

[22] *A.* i, p.16.

and commit wrong. In this way thoughtful reflection serves as the most fundamental purpose of Buddhist education by paving the path to aptitudes and skills which have an impact on one's behaviour.

Right Understanding arising out of *paratoghosa* and *yonisomanasikāra* is considered as twofold by way of acquiring it, namely, Mundane Right Understanding *(lokiya sammā diṭṭhi)* and Supra-mundane Right Understanding *(lokuttara sammā diṭṭhi).* Mundane Right Understanding has two aspects: the knowledge of volitional actions and their results *(kammassakata ñāna)* and the knowledge that accords with the Four Noble Truths *(saccānulomika ñāna).* However an exhaustive definition has been given by the commentarial tradition to include 'all knowledge tainted with fluxes' as Mundane Right Understanding.[23] As this understanding is basic and formative, it is not perfect being still contaminated with defilements. Hence it is otherwise named 'knowledge of knowing accordingly' *(anubodha ñāna).* On the other hand, Supra-mundane Right Understanding is the knowledge that dawns with the experience of attainments in relation to the Noble Path *(ariya magga phala sampayutta paññā).* Therefore it is known as penetrative wisdom *(paṭivedha ñāna).*[24]

Right Understanding is again classified according to the individuals who gain it. Firstly, there are worldings (*pothujjaniko)* who may be either outsiders *(bāhiraka)* or of the Buddhist fold *(sāsanika).* Secondly, there are persons still undergoing training *(sekha)* and thirdly, the adepts *(asekha)* who are endowed with perfect Right Understanding.

In the discourse on Right Understanding in the

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[23] *"Samkhepato sabbāpi sāsava paññā"*

[24] See *The Buddha's Ancient Path* by Piyadassi Nayaka Thera

Majjhima Nikāya there is a lively dialogue between a group of monks and Thera Sariputta on Right Understanding.[25] The discourse in question deals with a detailed description as to how a disciple of the Buddha came to be of Right Understanding; whose understanding is upright and is possessed of unwavering confidence in the right doctrine.

Although elaborated into sixteen headings, these theses can be easily classified into four. Hence Right Understanding can be achieved:

1. By way of reflecting on moral causation.
2. By way of reflecting on the four nutriments.
3. By way of reflecting on the Four Noble Truths.
4. By way of reflecting on Dependent Arising

Now, the disciple, reflecting on moral causation, comes to know the unskilful and the root of the unskilful—in this respect the disciple is endowed with Right Understanding on moral causation. Unskilful actions are ten in number:

1. killing
2. stealing
3. sexual misconduct
4. lying
5. slanderous speech
6. harsh speech
7. gossiping
8. covetousness
9. wrath
10. wrong understanding

The root of these unskilful actions are greed, hatred and delusion, while abstinence from the unskilful is rooted in non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion. Abstention from unskilful and resorting to skilful actions are the result of the knowledge of retribution of volitional actions which is nothing but Right Understanding. This implies that one who gains Right Understanding in regard to volitional acts

[25] *M.* i, pp.46 ff.

and their retribution would become morally good.

The second thesis elaborated on by Thera Sariputta deals with nutriments or food *(āhāra).* Practically speaking, on this simple term *'āhāra'* the entire teaching of the Buddha is hinged. This is said to be the 'one' in the question "what is one?" and is also said to be the one thing that is to be thoroughly understood *(eko dhammo abhiññeyyo).*

Nutriments and the quest for nutriments involve practically all our forms of activity, physical, psychological and sociological. It provides energy for our sustenance at all levels, material, biological, volitional and intellectual. Nutriments are four in number:

1. Solid food *(kabalinkārāhāra)*
2. Contact *(phassāhāra)*
3. Mental volition *(mano sañcetanāhāra)*
4. Consciousness *(viññānāhāra)*

Solid food is the source of our physical energy, but it should not be taken merely for pleasure *(na davāya),* not for indulgence *(na madāya),* not for personal charm *(na manḍanāya)* and not for comeliness *(na vibhusaṇāya),* but for the sheer necessity of living. Attachment to food would tend to develop the sense of taste leading to craving. Therefore temperance in food is advocated for the laity as well as for the ordained.

When considering contact as nutriment, sensory objects by which the senses are fed are discussed. Pleasurable, painful and indifferent sensation that originate in sensory contact have to be thoroughly understood.

Mental volition as nutriment signifies conceptualisation which keeps on feeding cyclic existence.

Consciousness is rebirth-linking consciousness which

at conception feeds mind and corporeality.

With regard to Right Understanding of the Four Noble Truths: suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the Path leading to the cessation of suffering are discussed. This Path which begins from the mundane level culminates in the supra-mundane level of understanding.

Now, by developing his thesis on dependent arising, Thera Sariputta takes several issues which are pertinent to the predicament of humanity as a whole. In this connection can be listed:

a) Decay and death *(jarāmarana)*
b) Birth *(jāti)*
c) Becoming *(bhava)*
d) Grasping *(upādāna)*
e) Craving *(taṇhā)*
f) Sensation *(vedanā)*
g) Contact *(phassa)*
h) Six faculties *(salāyatana)*
i) Mind and form *(nāma rūpa)*
j) Consciousness *(viññāna)*
k) Conformations *(sankhāra)*
l) Ignorance *(avijjā)*
m) Latent disposition of lust *(rāgānusaya)*
o) Latent disposition of illwill *(paṭighānusaya)*
p) Latent disposition of wrong understanding (diṭṭhānusaya)
q) Latent disposition of ignorance *(avijjānusaya)*

With reference to all these, their arising, cause of arising,

cessation and way leading to their cessation have to be contemplated and comprehended.

Therefore Right Understanding is the right vision acquired by correct perspective. Miss I. B. Horner in her translation of the *Sammādiṭṭhi-sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* taking the indeclinable *'sammā'* to mean 'perfect' renders *Sammā Diṭṭhi* as Perfect View.[26] Obviously her rendering exhausts the meaning denoted by *Sammā Diṭṭhi.* But 'view' taken singly is unilateral, partial and indicates incomplete knowledge. The fact is brought out by the Buddha by quoting the parable of the blind. Some blind men were made to touch an elephant to understand how it would look like. Each one touched only one part of the elephant: its head, ear, tusk, trunk, foot, back, tail, the tuft of its tail and they all came out with contradictory answers. Those who had been presented with the head said that the elephant looked like a pot, those who touched the ear were certain that it was like a winnowing-basket. To those who touched the tusk it was a ploughshare, those who felt only the trunk said it was a plough, those who touched the body, a granary; the foot, a pillar; the back, a mortar; the tail, a pestle; the tuft of the tail, just a broom. Afterwards there ensued a quarrel among the blind men over how an elephant would look like, which gradually escalated into fisticuffs.[27]

In the onward march to supra-mundane Right Understanding which begins from Mundane Right Understanding, there is an element of rationality. From the very inception to the end, it is a salient factor integrated into the Path. Certainly the Supreme Bliss envisaged in Buddhism is attained neither by devotion nor by mere faith nor by

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26 *MLS.* i, pp.57 ff.

27 *Udāna Pali* pp.68 ff.

prayer but by realisation of Truth.

Social Concern with a Difference

Buddhism emphasises the significance of moral behaviour of individual in consideration of his well-being as an individual as well as a part and parcel of society. Nobody can think of an individual apart from society. Individuals and society influence each other and the impact of the influence on each other is too explicit to be ignored. Buddhism therefore in laying out ethical behaviour for an individual's moral conduct, his social setting has been taken into account for the welfare of both the individual and society.

Individual perfection is anticipated primarily for the sake of creating a better social order with his participation. Being not submissive to the existing conditions he must strive to be better both materially and spiritually. As stressed in the *Sallekha-sutta,* "It is impossible for one who is stuck in mud to pull out another who is stuck in mud."[28] Also as given in the *Nāvā-sutta,* "How can a man fallen into a flowing river with deep water and rapid current carried away by swift flowing current help others cross it?"[29] The discourse itself provides the answer: "It is only a man who is skilful and wise who boarded a boat equipped with oars and rudder and experienced in the method of handling them can make many others cross over."[30] It is by recognising this fact Sabhiya saluted the Buddha saying, "You have crossed over and you have made us to cross over."[31] In fact, concern for the welfare of others is considered a

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[28] *M.* i, p.45

[29] *Sn.* p.319

[30] *Sn.* p.321

[31] *Sn.* p.545

virtue in Buddhism. Individual conduct has to be modelled in relation to the wellbeing of others in society. The dimension of Buddhist social thought has taken a unique turn by giving a criterion of universal application to differentiate good from evil. It is so realistic that it overpasses all the barriers that divide humanity by superimposed divisions.

The Buddha admonishing Rahula said: "If any action done by body, speech and mind. does not lead to one's own affliction or to the affliction of others or to the affliction of both, that action is to be evaluated as wholesome with pleasant consequences." The Buddha advises young Rahula to resort to that kind of action and to abstain from actions contrary to them. Herein what is significant is good and evil consequences of an act has to be judged in relation to oneself, in relation to others and thirdly, in relation to both parties taken together.[32] Individual morality is not sacrificed for the sake of society nor is social morality sacrificed for the sake of the individual.

The individual is a unit of society. When individuals of whom a society is constituted are considerate individually, society will tend to function smoothly. In Buddhist ethics this argument is extended to justify the objective validity of moral behaviour in terms of society. It is stated that "There is none more dear to oneself other than oneself in every direction of the world. Since there is no one else dear to oneself other than oneself, let not anyone who desires his own well-being harm others."[33] Subjective evaluation

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32 *M.* i, p.416

33 *Sabbādisā anuparigamma cetasā*
nevajjhagā piyataram attanā kvaci
evaṃ piyo puthu attā paresaṃ
tasmā na himse paraṃ attakāmo—*S.* i, p.75

of this objective truth is described in the *Veludvara-sutta* at length.

According to the method of comparing oneself with others as set out in the discourse the Aryan disciple thus reflects:

"I am fond of my life, not wanting to die, fond of pleasure and averse to pain. Suppose someone should rob me of my life, it would not be a thing pleasing or delightful to me. If I, in my turn, should rob someone of his life, one fond of his life, not wanting to die, one fond of pleasure and averse to pain, it would not be a thing pleasing or delightful to him. For a state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?"

"As a result of such reflection, he himself abstains from killing living beings and he encourages others to do so, and speaks in praise of such abstinence."

Then again the Aryan disciple reflects thus: "If someone should take with thievish intent what I have not given him, it would not be a thing pleasing or delightful to me. If I, in my turn, should take from another with thievish intent what he has not given me, it would not be a thing pleasing or delightful to him; and a state that is not pleasant, that is not delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?"

"As a result of such reflection, he himself abstains from taking what is not given and he encourages others to do so, and speaks in praise of such abstinence."

Again the Aryan disciple thus reflects: "If someone should misbehave with my wife, it would not be a thing pleasing or delightful to me. If I, in my turn, should so behave with the wives of others it would not be a thing pleasing or delightful to them. And a state that is unpleasant not delightful

to me, how could I inflict that upon another?"

"As a result of this reflection, he himself abstains from wrong practices in respect of sensual gratification and he encourages others to do so, and speaks in praise of such abstinence. Thus as regards personal conduct he is utterly pure."

Again the Aryan disciple reflects thus: "If someone should spoil my fortune by lying, cause estrangement from my friends by slander, treat me with harsh speech, treat me with pointless frivolous talk, it would not be a thing pleasant or delightful to me. If I, in my turn should spoil another's fortune by lying, alienate him from his friends by slander, treat him with harsh speech, treat him with pointless frivolous talk, it would not be a thing pleasant or delightful to him, and a state that is unpleasant, not delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?"

"As a result of this reflection, he himself abstains from lying, from slandering, from harsh speech, from pointless frivolous talk and he encourages others to do so, and speaks in praise of such abstinence. Thus as regards conduct in speech he is utterly pure". This is called the Method of Comparing One's Feelings with Others' *(attupanāyika dhammapariyāya).*[34]

Taking all these into account one can easily define early Buddhism as a system of religious practice founded on a philosophical, ethical and pragmatic basis.

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[34] *S.* v, p.307

Two Kinds of Diseases: Disease of Body & Disease of Mind

"Monks, there are these two kinds of diseases. What two? Disease of body and disease of mind."

"Dve'me bhikkhave rogā. Katame dve. Kāyiko rogo cetasiko rogo."

—*A.* ii, p.142–3

2. Dhamma, Medicine and Sociology

In several places of the Pali canon the Buddha calls Himself a physician and a surgeon.[1] Obviously, two aspects of the concept of prescribing medication and healing are discernible in the life and teaching of the Buddha. He is a therapist for spiritual ills who prescribed a course of action to be followed for the alleviation of spiritual suffering of entire humankind. He is also a physician, greatly concerned about the physical afflictions of the disciples, so that they should be physically healthy and fit to carry out the obligations of the monkhood. The analogy of physician and medication can be studied in these two relative aspects since they together illustrate the Buddha's mission as a practical teacher who spent forty-five years of His life for the weal and welfare of humanity.

Dhamma as Medicine

The Buddha, the physician par excellence, administers medicine in the form of *dhamma* to the mentally and spiritually sick for their recovery from ills by which they suffer throughout their lives. The *dhamma* is medicine and considered a colourful sugar-coated medicinal pill. The fact has been brought to light in a discourse in the *Majjhima Nikāya.* As given there, undertaking of the *dhamma* is conducive to happiness both in the present as well as in the future. The Buddha illustrating the fact says: "The *dhamma* is as if honey, oil and sugar had been mixed together and given to a man suffering from dysentery. While he drinks he might be pleased with its colour, scent and taste. After having drunk it, he would get his illness cured. Therefore

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1 *Iti.* p.101

the undertaking of the *dhamma* is pleasant now and it ripens in the future as pleasant and with its shining and beaming radiance it surpasses other doctrines whatsoever that are preached by ordinary recluses and brahmins."[2]

In another instance, addressing Sunakkhatta, a Licchavi, He explains the present predicament of man and how he should achieve his welfare in this world and in the next. In the course of the explanation a simile of a man wounded by a dart and a surgeon attending on him has been drawn. At the end, identifying the different constituents of the simile, He says that he spoke in terms of a simile in order to convey the following meanings: " 'Wound' is a term for the six internal bases. 'Poisonous' humour (septicaemia) is a term for ignorance. 'Dart' is a term for craving. 'Probe' is a term for mindfulness. 'Knife' is a term for 'noble wisdom. 'Surgeon' is a term for the *Tathagata*, the Accomplished One, the Fully Enlightened One."[3]

Comparatively, mental health is far more important than physical health. Mental health contributes to physical health and vice versa. Wrong perception makes a person sick in mind. When once Nakulapitā, the householder, said to the Buddha that he was aged, advanced in years, old and had lived out his span of life, sick and was always ailing, the Buddha told him that if a person who took material form, feeling, perception, conformations and consciousness as substantial he would be sick in mind. Although physical health had begun to deteriorate in old age one could maintain mental health through correct and right perception.[4]

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2 *M.* i, pp.316–7

3 *M.* ii, p.259

4 *S.* iii, p.1 ff.

The fact that mental hygiene is a desirability is highlighted in another discourse. Addressing the monks the Buddha says: "There are to be seen beings who can admit freedom from suffering from bodily disease for one year, for two years, for three years, four, five, for ten, twenty, thirty, forty and fifty years. But monks; those beings are hard to find in the world, who can admit freedom from mental disease even for one moment save only those in whom the defilements have been destroyed."[5]

The Buddha's preaching of the *dhamma* to the suffering world can be compared to the administration of medicine to the sick by a physician. In the very first sermon, 'The Turning of the Wheel of Law', the Buddha's expounding of the Four Noble Truths can be understood on the analogy of a pathological analysis of affliction and cure. Therein the present predicament of man is analysed in the First Noble Truth with its physical, psychological and psycho-physical aspects, showing how those afflictions are woven into the fabric of our existence.

Then in the Second Truth, the root cause of the present affliction, which exists in the form of desire, is broken down into its constituents for the better understanding of that cause. In the Third, the state of being redeemed from afflictions by regaining health is described, which is nothing but *Nibbāna,* the Supreme Bliss. In the Fourth Truth, the remedy to ameliorate the affliction is prescribed by way of the Noble Eightfold Path. It is quite clear that the theory of causality also applies to the analysis of suffering, the cause of suffering and its appeasement and path.

Buddhism, when taken as a whole is therapeutic in character. It analyses the causes and conditions of the present

[5] *A.* ii, p.143

predicament of human existence and suggests remedial measures to be followed for the alleviation of it. Because of the scientific methodology that has been followed by the Buddha in the first sermon, the Cambridge psychologist, Thouless, says that it is "very much like a modern lecture on bacteriology, where disease, the cause of the disease by the multification in the blood stream of bacteria and viruses and then the cure and the destruction of the invading bacteria and viruses by injecting antibiotics and other medicinal substances to the blood stream of the patient is explained".[6]

The Buddha's approach to suffering and its remedy was so rational and convincing that a later Indian philosopher, too, followed the same methodology of analysis in order to explain the cyclic existence of beings. He is none other than Patanjali who directly referring to the science of medicine to draw the analogy of disease, the cause of disease, recovery and cure, emphasises that Yoga philosophy is also divided into four sections. The cycle of existence is suffering, the cause of suffering is the union of *prakrti* and *purusa.*[7] The termination of the union is release. Right

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[6] Thouless Robert H.—*Christianity and Buddhism,* p.7, Buddhist Research Society, Singapore and also *World of Buddhism,* Vol. 7, No. 1, 1990/91, Sri Lanka

[7] *"Yathā cikitsasāstram caturvyūham rogo rogahetuh arogym bhaisajyamiti evampidam sāstram caturvyūuham; tadyathā: samsārah samsārahetuh moksah moksopāyah; dukkhabahulah samsāro heyah, pradhānpurusayoh samyogo heyahetuh, Samyogastantaki nivrttir hānam"—Yogasutra,* ii, 15.

The commentator Buddhaghosa elucidating the implications of the Four Noble Truths in the *Visuddhimagga,* among other similes, the simile in question also has been drawn: "The truth of suffering is like a disease, the truth of origin is like the cause of the disease, the truth of cessation

vision is the means of release. Patanjali is obviously later than the Buddha.[8]

The therapeutic approach is so fundamental to early Buddhism that Thouless does not hesitate to name it as a system of psychotherapy. For he says: "I think that primitive Buddhism must be understood as a system of psychotherapy. Acceptance of Christian faith may of course also give relief from mental burdens but this is only incidental whereas the therapeutic aim of Buddhism is fundamental. This is why I think we can feel that many of the teachings of the Buddha are relevant to our needs in a way that would have been impossible to our grandfathers, because we have accepted and become used to the aim of psychotherapy."[9]

Commenting on the *Sabbāsava-sutta* which deals with the elimination of *āsava* he develops his thesis and asserts that *āsava* can be best understood if it is translated as mental stress.

According to the *sutta* in question, seven different ways have to be adopted to get rid of different kinds of āsava.

1. By vision *(dassanā)*
2. By *control (saṃvarā)*

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is like the cure of the disease, and the truth of the path is like the medicine"—*The Path of Purification,* p. 586 (xvi, 87), Translated by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli.

As *Culavansa I,* xxxvii, 215 ff., asserts Buddhaghosa might have mastered Patanjali's Yoga philosophy. But it does not mean that he has borrowed the simile from Patanjali.

8 "I am disposed to think that the date of the first three chapters of the *Yogasutra* must be placed about the 2nd century B.C." Dasgupta S—*History of Indian Philosophy,* Vol. i, p. 238

9 Thouless Robert H—*Christianity and Buddhism,* p.5

3. By association *(paṭisevanā)*
4. By endurance *(adhivāsanā)*
5. By avoidance *(parivajjanā)*
6. By elimination *(vinodanā)*
7. By mind culture *(bhavanā)*[10]

Āsavas have been defined as 'destructive and consuming' *(vighāta parilāha)* in the text which is actually their overall effect.

The therapeutic approach of the doctrine is summed up again and again in several places of the canon. In one place it is stated that the Noble Eightfold Path should be developed to destroy āsava, while in another, mindfulness of breathing in and breathing out. Yet in another instance, the eight constituents of the Path have been mentioned together with Right Knowledge and Right Release to be developed to destroy them.[11] This shows that the destruction of different kinds of āsava is fundamental to Buddhist training and that it is therapeutic in character in prescribing remedial measures.

So much so that the monk who is proficient in the practice leading to a sure course to *Nibbāna* has three means for the destruction of *āsava*.

i. He keeps watch over the doors of his sense faculties.

ii. He is moderate in eating.

iii. He is given to watchfulness.[12]

The Buddha is a physician in the sense of prescribing a

[10] *M.* i, pp.6–13

[11] *S.* v, p.236; *S.* v, p. 340; and *A.* v, p.237

[12] *A.* ii, p.209

remedy for suffering humanity. Just as a physician would do, he identifies the cause of present unsatisfactoriness and discomfort found in physical, psychological and psycho-physical spheres of human life. The diagnosis generally leads to treatment, prognosis and the final outcome of it. Here the method of healing followed is empirical and mundane pertaining to our day-to-day experience; the final outcome is spiritual and transcendental aimed at Perfection. The imagery of healer and medicine with reference to the Buddha and the doctrine has been illustrated by Pingiyani to Karnapalin in an alluring phraseology. He says: "Just sir, as a clever physician might in a moment take away the sickness of one sick and ailing, grievously ill, even so sir, whenever one hears the master Gotama's *dhamma,* grief, lamentation, suffering, sorrow and despair vanish."[13]

Let alone the *dhamma,* sometimes the *vinaya* also has been compared to medicine. Nagasena in the *Milindapañha* draws the comparison between the levying of the disciplinary rules by the Buddha and administration of medicine by a physician in order to bring out the fact that the Buddha is a physician par excellence.[14]

Physical Ailments and Medication

The aspect of prescribing medicines for physical ailments and the concern depicted in regard to hygiene and sanitation of the community of monks are also sometimes mentioned to describe the Buddha as a healer. In the *vinaya* one whole chapter has been devoted to medicine and different kinds of afflictions. Medical practitioners have been consulted and medications in vogue at the time have been

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13 *A.* iii, p.237

14 *Mil.* I, p.74

prescribed for sick monks with utmost concern within the limits of the obligations of the monkhood.

Sociological Significance of Sickness

Although the terms ‘illness’, ‘disease’ and ‘sickness’ are synonymous in everyday usage, they have been defined from a sociological perspective as conditions related to one another but implying independent denotations. The presence of one does not necessarily mean the presence of the other two.[15]

Illness is a subjective psychological phenomenon while disease is objective and biological and based on pathology. Sickness is considered a social phenomenon recognised to be the condition of the person having an illness. One may be ill without having a disease; another may have a disease without feeling ill. Yet another may feel ill being affected by a disease yet not considered as sick. It is the physician who diagnoses the complaints and confirms him to be a patient within society and prescribes medication. However according to Talcott Parsons, a functionalist theorist, sickness is a social as well as a biological phenomenon.[16] So the social involvement and the interaction between the patient and the healer, the problems of medication, health and sanitation are sociological concerns. The early Buddhist contribution in this regard although confined to Buddhist monasticism alone, is a very significant sociological issue.

Functionalist View–Relation to Buddhist Approach

A society can function well only if its members are capable

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15 Robertson Ian—*Sociology*, p.439, Third Edition, New York, 1987 Twaddle Andrew—*Social Science and Medicine*, p.751 ff. New York 1973

16 Ibid, p.441

of playing their roles efficiently.[17] Therefore when viewed from a sociological perspective, the maintenance of physical health and the sanitation of the community of monks was a necessity because it is very difficult to expect either personal or social achievement of any sort from any society where poor health and sanitation prevail.

Sociologically the individual's health influences the fulfillment of his objective in view leaving an impact on society as a whole. Hence the poor health of its members will disrupt social mobility and function. What is discernible in the Buddha's approach as revealed in the *vinaya* is that, unlike in primitive or folk religions, medications prescribed are not an aspect of religion nor a form of magic or witchcraft or exorcism where the priest or the witch doctor or exorcist plays the role of healer.

Health as the Most Precious Asset

Buddhism considers health as the most precious asset that a human can possess for the sake of which one may sacrifice his wealth, power, prestige and even everything. Among the five things that contribute to prosperity health is also given as one.[18] Health is also declared to be a desirable in the list of ten desirables in the world. Unseasonable action *(asappāya kiriyā)* impairs one's health.[19] So much so that it is said that those who are healthy are sometimes proud of their health together with two other factors, youth and life.[20] Though themselves subject to disease and not having

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17 Ibid. Also see Parsons Talcott—*The Structure of Social Action*, New York, 1937

18 *D.* iii, p.235

19 *A.* v, p.135

20 *D.* iii, p.220

passed beyond disease, when they see another person diseased, are troubled, ashamed, disgusted and forget that they themselves are subject to disease.[21] Motivated by pride of health people practise immorality. Again it is stated that being obsessed by pride of health they commit evils through body, mind and word.[22]

The *Magandiya-sutta* illustrates the fact as to why health is called the precious asset and *Nibbāna,* the Supreme Bliss. The teachers of other persuasions also proclaim the same thing but they do not know the correct implication of it. To illustrate the point, the Buddha draws the simile of a leper, whose limbs are all ravaged and festering, being eaten by vermin, tearing his open sores with his nails. When he is cured and well he would never revert to the original position at any cost. Similarly a man blind from birth would not aspire to be blind again after his eyesight has been restored; because physical health is what they yearned for the most.[23]

Introduction of Monasticism & Health problems

The eremitical life of monks gradually evolved into monastic life with the acceptance of the Bamboo Grove by the Buddha from King Bimbisara. Soon after the Buddha's granting permission to accept lodgings as monasteries, the treasurer of Rajagaha built sixty habitats and offered them to the monks. They seemed to have been simple shelters without doors or windows and were not colour-washed. They were not furnished at all. With the introduction of collective living, new problems seemed to have come up. Now

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21 *A.* v, p.135

22 *A.* i, p.146 and *A.* iii, p.72

23 *M.* i, pp. 508–9

due to the changing lifestyle of monks who stepped into community living from the stage of itinerant mendicancy, their roles had to be redefined and formulated in conformity with the prevailing situation.

Firstly the *sangha* consisted of a wide variety of social segments. There were differences among them not only with regard to their former occupations based on caste hierarchy, but also in respect of social norms, dialects and subcultures as well. Making the situation much more grave as Thera Nagasena puts it in the *Milindapañha,* all of them had not entered the monkhood for the sole purpose of realising *Nibbāna* by being faithful to the obligations of the monkhood. He said to Milinda: "Some have left the world in terror of the tyranny of kings. Some to be safe from being robbed. Some to escape being harassed by debt-collectors and some perhaps to gain a livelihood."[24]

With the gradual increase of new converts in the community of monks, more and more dwellings were set up by devotees and offered to them for their living. Community living naturally gave way to problems of health and sanitation hitherto unknown and not experienced by them. The steps taken to arrest the situation characterised the *sangha* as a community distinct from other groups of recluses at the time.

The main concern of the Buddha was to bind the *sangha* together by the common bond of brotherhood irrespective of its members' former social positions and to integrate them into one unitary organisation cherishing collective consciousness of helping each other for each other's welfare. Besides, the *sangha* had to be organised as a distinct community with a particular identity of its own. Hence to

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[24] *Mil.* i, p.32

realise those objectives, first of all, the *sangha* must be healthy, pleasant and exemplary in their day to day behaviour. The problems of hygiene and sanitation which had arisen due to community living had to be solved, arresting infection and environmental pollution in and around monasteries to make monasteries as well as monasterial apartments not only hygienic and sanitary but also tidy and clean to behold.

The fact that the gradual increase in the number of members living together in monasteries gave way to hygienic and sanitary problems is seen from the *vinaya*. Most of the disciplinary measures found in chapters v, vi and vii of the *Cullavagga-pāli* deal with the standard of living which began to deteriorate due to community living in monasteries. New measures had to be taken to thwart unbecoming behaviour on the one hand and to make monasteries into sanitary and pleasant abodes on the other.

With the permission given from time to time, simple shelters evolved into pleasant dwellings with curtains, doors, windows, latches, inner rooms, verandahs, verandah roofings, moveable screens, assembly halls, separate places to keep drinking water and water pots for drinking water, porches, gravel on the courtyards, ditches to drain water, fireplaces, canopies to serve the purpose of ceilings were introduced and made the dwellings more congenial to living. The precautions taken to sanitize the environment were carried out, further making more and more rules and regulations.

In the apartments, mopping the floor, dusting, clearing cobwebs, cleaning, sweeping were prescribed together with measures for personal hygiene. Washing one's feet As one enters the monastery, prohibition of spitting on the floor, using a spittoon, procedures to be followed in using

drinking water, location of a specific place to kindle fire were innovations that came into effect in the course of time. The precautions taken to sanitize the environment went on further.

As they had been accustomed to as laymen, monks were in the habit of relieving themselves here and there and everywhere in the monastery grounds. So several steps were taken to put up two separate toilets: one for urination and the other for emptying the bowels and washing the rectum. Standards of behaviour were set up for the use of toilets. It is stated that the toilets were to be used on the basis of 'first come first serve', not on seniority basis as we find in other instances. Cesspools were dug to drain sewage and dump garbage.[25]

Throughout the *Khandhaka* there are references to the Buddha's concern for the personal hygiene of monks. From many of the instances referring to personal hygiene, the five advantages of brushing one's teeth can be quoted. Encouraging the monks to brush their teeth the Buddha points out five disadvantages of not brushing one's teeth:

i. Bad for the eyes
ii. Nasty smell of the mouth
iii. The sense of taste is blunted
iv. Phlegm and mucus get on the food
v. One's food cannot be enjoyed.[26]

Medicine as One of the Four Requisites of Monkhood

Even in the early beginnings of Buddhist monasticism, the Buddha was concerned about the physical health

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[25] *Vin.* ii, p.140

[26] *Vin.* ii, p.192

of the monks. It is evident from the fact that along with other bare necessities of monastic life: alms food, clothing and shelter, medicine is also given as one. The list of four resources which is identical and to be explained to a newly ordained, *pūtimuttabhesajja* is named as medicine. Ghee, fresh butter, oil, honey and molasses are mentioned as extra acquisitions.[27]

Physical Fitness and Health

The lifestyle of monks in the early stage of the setting up of the dispensation ensured their physical health by natural means. Constant walking without a fixed abode may have served the purpose of physical exercise conducive to physical fitness. On the other hand, meditation also added a physical aspect congenial to the meditator's physical fitness. In regard to the arousing of mindfulness on in-breathing and out-breathing, the meditator was instructed to sit down, bend his legs crosswise on his lap, keep his body erect, and arouse mindfulness on the object of meditation. A simile is given to illustrate the point. He is asked to meditate just as a clever turner or a turner's apprentice is conscious whether he is turning long or short.[28]

The Buddha had the habit of walking up and down in the wee hours of the morning. It was on such an occasion

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[27] *Vin.* i, p.58

[28] *M.* i, p.56. In addition to walking, lying down and standing meditative postures, seating cross-legged, holding the back erect, mindful inhaling and exhaling are considered to have an impact on the meditator's blood circulation related to the upper part of the body and the brain. Once the meditator had finished his meditation, blood circulation, body temperature, metabolism or the body's ability to convert food into energy would become regular.

that the treasurer Anathapindika met the Buddha at Simsapa Grove. In the canon we come across the clause *janghāvihāraṃ anucaṃkamati anuvicarati* with reference to walking on foot which is a walk conducive to one's health, a constitutional walk.[29]

With settled monasticism, the lifestyle of the monks began to change and seemed to have affected their physical health too. Some monks in Vesali who ate sumptuous meals were often very ill with their bodies full of bad humours. Jivaka, the physician who happened to be in Vesali for some business or other, saw these monks whose bodies were full of bad humours *(abbisanna kāyo).* Being moved by the plight of these monks he approached the Buddha and requested the Buddha to give the monks a place for pacing up and down; a *cankamana* and *jantāghara.*[30]

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29 *'Janghavihāra'* is explained in the PTS Dictionary as a walk taken for one's health, a constitutional walk. Ven. Nanamoli and Ven. Bodhi in their *Majjhima Nikāya* translation render it as 'walking for exercise'—*D.* i, p.235. *M.* i, p.108 & p.136

30 *Vin.* ii, p.118 Miss. Horner in her *Vinaya* translations renders '*jantāghara*' as 'bathroom'. Some others believe that it was a place of common bath. PTS Dictionary deriving the word from the root 'jhā' to burn says that in all probability it is a distorted form by dissimilation or analogy and quotes '*jentaka*' (hot dry bath) given by Hardy and the meaning given to the word in the *Abhidhānappadīpikā,* which defines it as '*aggisālā*'. Undoubtedly the old tradition is preserved in the *Abhidhānappadipikā.*

As the use of wells and ponds have been permitted subsequently, it may not be simply a bathroom or a place of common bath. The permission granted to use involves the sick. Therefore it can be surmised that it was a place of hot bath or steam bath. The fact is brought to light by an incident recorded in the *Vinaya.* Once the group of six monks being hindered in their use of *Jantāghara* by some senior monks, out of disrespect, they kindled fire inside and sat on the door-

Later on the *jantaghara* was improved in many ways.[31]

Causes of Afflictions on Grounds of Aetiology

Often in the scriptures we come across eight causes of human afflictions on grounds of aetiology. Although with slight variations, the standard list of eight is given in several places together with two humours of the Western analysis found in the Middle Ages in Europe.[32]

Accordingly afflictions are caused by:

1. the agitation of the bile *(pittasamutthānā)*
2. the agitation of phlegm *(semha samutthānā)*
3. the agitation of wind *(vata samutthānā)*
4. the union of humours *(sannipātajā)*
5. the change of seasons *(utuparināmajā)*
6. stress of circumstance *(visama parihārajā)*
7. personal assault *(opakkamikā)*
8. the ripening of an evil kamma *(kammavipākajā)*

An empirical approach to sickness is seen in the aetiological analysis in the scriptures. It has been made clear pretty well by the Buddha to Thera Sivaka when he expounded the view of some recluses who maintained that afflictions were caused by previous *kamma.* The Buddha, rejecting the idea totally, pointed out that *kamma* was only one of the factors that caused a person to be sick and those brahmins and recluses who cherished the idea that *kamma* was

way. The monks not being able to come out fell down fainting—*Vin.* ii, p.308

31 *Vin.* ii, p.118 ff.

32 *S.* iv. p.230; *A.* ii, p. 87; *A.* iii. p.131

contributory to every sickness were going beyond personal experience and what was generally acknowledged by the world and declared them to be wrong.[33]

Buddhist Theory of Humours

Bile, phlegm and wind are generic terms used in the Indian system of aetiology of diseases covering wider ranges within each category, which seem to be different from the theory of humours that dominated medicine in Europe for about fourteen hundred years until the dawn of modern pathology in the age of Renaissance. According to the theory of humours which prevailed in Europe at that time, the body is composed of four humours of body fluids: blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. It was believed that a person's health and his dispositions depended upon the proper balance of these humours. The theory is said to have been based on Empedocles' philosophic view that the world and everything in it was composed of four elements: fire, air, earth and water. Later, with reference to human beings, these were interpreted to mean blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile, which had been accepted by the father of Western medicine, Hippocrates, and later even by Aristotle and Galen, the famous Greek physician in the 2nd century. Mark Tatz maintains that disequilibrium of the four elements as the cause of afflictions is a theory held by all Buddhist schools and that it also prevailed in Buddhist India. He quotes the *Mahāhatthipadopama-sutta* to show that early Buddhism has attributed the origin of diseases to four elements or four kinds of materiality: extension

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[33] *S.* iv. p.230. The commentary adds a note saying that all afflictions can be treated medicinally except those which have resulted from the ripening of *kamma*—*SA*, ii, p.87

(pathavi), cohesion *(āpo),* caloricity *(tejo)* and oscillation *(vāyu).*[34] The *sutta* in question has nothing to say about the pathogenesis of any ailment, it generally speaks about the impermanence of internal and external elements; nor does the *sutta* say anything to the effect that afflictions are the outcome of elemental imbalance.[35] The theory however is found in the Chinese translations of Mahayana Buddhist texts, probably under the influence of Chinese pathology.[36] But in the Pali texts these elementary causes or humours causing diseases: bile, phlegm and wind, have been described to denote numerous infections and normal, irregular and abnormal functions of the body. For instance, wind *(vāta)* has been classified into ten:

1. Up-going wind including the force that helps one vomit *(uddhaṃgama vāta)*
2. Down-going wind including the force that helps one pass urine and empty the bowels *(adhogama vāta)*
3. Wind in the abdomen *(kucchisaya vāta)*
4. Wind affecting a particular part of the body *(koṭṭhāsasaya vāta)*
5. Wind that goes through the veins including the force that helps blood circulate *(aṃgamangānusāri vāta)*
6. Wind that causes cutting pain *(satthaka vāta)*
7. Wind that causes very sharp pain *(khuraka vāta)*
8. Wind that causes puffing up (*uppalaka vāta)*

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[34] To avoid ambiguity, I prefer to use the terms used by Ven. Soma in *The Way of Buddhist Meditation,* Tatz Mark—*Buddhism and Healing,* p. 65, University Press of America

[35] *M.* i p.230

[36] Tatz Mark—*Buddhism and Healing,* p.73

9. Inhaling wind *(assāso)*
10. Exhaling wind *(passāso)*[37]

In addition to these divisions numerous other kinds of wind-affected pains have been identified: Pain in the limbs *(angavāta),*[38] belly-ache *(udaravāta),*[39] labour pains *(kammajavāta),*[40] pain in the abdomen *(kucchivāta),*[41] pain in the back *(piṭṭivāta).*[42] The stress of circumstance includes the discrepant attention to the body and personal assault denotes either external means or spasmodic affliction. In the same vein a list of diseases has been mentioned in several places in the canon. Some of these diseases are tropical and the list provides the names of the diseases widely recognised at the time and which still continue to aggravate human suffering even today. These afflictions are: illnesses affecting eye-sight, hearing, nose, tongue, trunk, head, ear, mouth, teeth, abdomen as well as coughing, asthma, cataract, inflammation, fever, swooning, dysentery, gripe, cholera, abscesses, eczema, consumption, epilepsy, ringworm, scabs, nail scabs, scabies, bile in the blood (jaundice), diabetes, haemorrhoids, cancer and fistula.[43] Leprosy, abscesses, eczema, consumption and epilepsy were raging in Magadha.[44] Those who are affected by these five diseases, to this day, are neither to be ordained,

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37 *Vbh.* p.84, MA. pp–30–1, *VbhA.* p.70, *Vism.* p.350

38 *Vin.* i, p.205

39 *J.* i, p.393, *DbA.* iv, 205

40 *Vism.* p.500

41 *VibbA.* p.5

42 Ibid

43 *A.* ii, p.87; iii, p.131; *S.* iv, p.230

44 *Vin.* i, p.93

nor conferred Higher Ordination as requested by Jivaka, the royal physician.[45]

The 'Medicalisation' of the Sangha

Although Buddhism advocates a system of mental development, physical health was also considered as a fundamental requirement for the successful achievement of the objective. The sick were encouraged to get medical treatment so that they may get cured without putting their lives at risk. The Buddha's attitude on patients, medication and the purpose of tending the sick illustrate the point in question. In the *Anguttara Nikāya* the Buddha states that there are three kinds of patients:

1. Incurable with or without proper diet, proper medicine and proper nursing.
2. Curable with or without proper diet, proper medicine and proper nursing.
3. Curable without proper diet, proper medicine and proper nursing.

Therefore a sick person is to be attended upon on the chance of recovering by proper diet, proper medicine and proper nursing. Presumably it is because of this reason that proper diet, proper medicine and proper attendance have been enjoined with reference to ailing monks.[46]

According to some sociologists we are at present witnessing a process of medicalisation of society with a highly qualified medical profession extending power over many areas of human life considered non-medical a few decades ago. With more and more expertise and trained person-

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45 *Vin.* i, pp.92, 94 ff.

46 *A.* i, p.121

nel, the profession is exercising a vital influence on many aspects of modern man's life, making him aware of the need for regular medical check-ups and medications for every kind of ailment however insignificant it may be. This process has made an indelible impact on every civilised society in the modern world.[47] The Buddha's introduction of therapeutics and subsequent steps taken to make the community of monks a healthy body is also more or less a 'medicalisation' of the community with binding disciplinary measures.

As revealed by the scriptures in general and the *Vinaya pitaka* in particular, the medicalisation of the *sangha* led to several trends of development in Buddhist monasticism:

1. Consulting physicians and acquiring their service for diverse ailments.
2. Introducing medications and surgery for sick monks.
3. Acquiring medical equipment for the use of the community.
4. Storing medicines and equipment safely in separate places.
5. Creating sick-wards.
6. Tending the sick as a virtue as well as a moral obligation.
7. Listing concessional privileges for the sick and for the attendants.
8. Drafting medical ethics not only for the attendant but for the patient as well.

As the *Bhesajjakkhandhaka* reveals, the first incident of allowing medication for monks was an affliction due to cli-

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47 Robertson Ian—*Sociology* p.435 ff., Third Edition, New York

matic conditions. The Buddha having seen that those monks being affected by an autumnal disease *(sāradikābādha)* were wretched, of a bad colour, yellowish, their veins standing out, and having lost their appetite altogether, had become lean and weak due to lack of nutriments, enjoined medication "although it may serve as nutriments for people, it would not be considered as substantial food but agreed upon as medicine".[48] As an additional remedy the Buddha permitted them to use ghee, fresh butter, oil, honey and molasses as medicine.[49] While discussing the first beginnings of Buddhist monasticism, the *Mahāvagga* gives a list of four resources which are to be explained to a new recruit to the order where these five items have been mentioned as extra acquisitions supplementary to the fourth resource, *pūtimuttabhesajja,* the resource of medicine. Both Miss Horner as well as Mr Woodward has translated the word

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48 *Vin.* i, p.269

49 As described in the *Vinaya,* ghee includes ghee from cows or from she-goats or from buffaloes or from those animals whose meat is suitable for human consumption. Fresh butter is fresh butter from just these. Oil includes sesamum oil, oil of mustard seeds, oil containing honey, oil of the castor oil plant and oil from tallow. Honey is honey of bees and molasses is what is produced from sugar cane.—*Vin.* ii, pp.131–2, and also *Vin.* iv, p.88

Raoul Birnbaum referring to experiments of these healing agents by pathologist and physician Guido Majno quotes his work, *The Healing Hand* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), where Guido Majno has said that honey is "practically harmless to the tissues, asceptic, antiseptic, and antibiotic".

Birnbaum gives several reasons to show why it does not support bacterial growth and further illustrates that the addition of grease, oil, or butter gives the honey a more soothing consistency.—Birnbaum, Rauol—*The Healing Buddha.* p.5 and p.19, Shambhala, Boston, 1989

pūtimuttabhasajja as 'ammonia' which as popularly known may mean the colourless gas used for the manufacture of fertilizers, nitric acid, explosives and synthetic fibers, perhaps better known as a chemical which helps plants grow and used to keep things cold. Actually, *'pūtimutta'* is strong-smelling fermented cattle urine used as medicine.[50] It is stated that this is a trifling thing easily gotten and blameless as the remaining three of the four resources.[51]

Gradually, not only these were allowed to be used at any time for different kinds of afflictions, but also tallow, roots of plants, powder, leaves, fruits, other medicinal powders and astringent concoctions have been allowed to be used as medicine, because these things neither serve the purpose of solid food *(khādanīyattha)* nor the purpose of soft food *(bhojanīyattha)*. The lists of these herbs, roots and leaves are given in the text. Once Venerable Sariputta suffered from fever and Venerable Moggallana cured him with lotus-stalks. When he was afflicted with *udaravāta,* a stomach trouble *(gastritis?)* Venerable Moggallana gave him garlic and so cured him.[52]

Eye diseases have been mentioned. The remedy was eye ointment; for headaches, application of oil on the head; for acute headache (migraine?) medical treatment through the

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50 The process of preparation as well as the medical properties of this medicine are yet to be analysed and determined. We do not know whether it was as effective as an antibiotic to treat infections caused by bacteria or fungi, or adminstered as a bacteriocidal antibiotic like penicillin, tetracycline or chlorampenicol. The commentary defines it as yellow myrobalan fermented in cattle urine. *(gomuttaparibhāvitam harītakam—VinA.* p.1092)

51 *A.* ii. p.27

52 *Vin.* i, p.214, ii, p.140

nose for which a nose spoon was prescribed, then inhaling medicinal smoke as further treatment. Thera Pilindavaccha suffered from rheumatism and a physician was consulted. He was given strong drinks mixed with oil. Again when he suffered from rheumatism in the limbs, a number of treatments were given: Sweating treatment by the use of all kinds of herbs, then some other treatments called great sweating, hemp water and dipping in a warm water vessel. For rheumatism in the joints, phlebotomy or blood-letting and for severe cases, cupping with a horn was the treatment. For boils; lancing, washing with astringent concoctions, mustard powder, fumigation, applying medicinal oil, linen bandages and many other kinds of treatments have been prescribed. The treatment for poisoning was to drink a concoction of dung and mud turned up by the plough (probably to induce vomit). For snake bites, a concoction of dung, urine, ashes and clay was given. For constipation,[53] a drink of raw lye *(āmisakhāra)*, and for jaundice, cow urine and yellow myrobalan. For skin diseases, a perfume paste; for bad humours, a purgative and then clarified conjee, unprepared broth and meat broth. For the agitation of the wind humour in the body, salted sour gruel *(lona sovīraka)*.[54]

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53 The Pali word given for constipation is '*duṭṭhagahanika*'. The condition of being unable to empty the bowels frequently enough or effectively. The commentary too defines it more or less in the same way.("*Dutthagahaniko'ti kicchena uccāro nikkhamatī'ti attho*"—*VinA*. v, p.1092)

54 Both PTS Dictionary and Miss Horner take '*āmisa*' to mean 'raw', probably taking '*āmisa*' in the sense of 'raw'. 'Lye' for '*khāra*', which may mean any alkaline solution. But here '*āmisa*' means 'food' in the sense of 'rice'. According to the commentary the healing agent given here is the extract of

In the canon special attention has been paid to the healing properties of conjee. Several kinds of conjee or gruel have been prescribed to be prepared with different ingredients: Clarified conjee *(acchakanji)* prepared with a small amount of rice, unprepared broth *(akatayūsa)* prepared with a small amount of kidney beans, conjee prepared with 'three kinds' *(te katula yāgu):* sesamum, rice and kidney beans. Salted sour gruel mixed with much water has also been permitted to be used as a beverage. Gruel in general has been considered an important item in the monks' diet. Benefits of offering gruel are given in the *Vinaya:*

In giving gruel one gives to the recipient:

i. life
ii. beauty
iii. ease
iv. strength and
v. intelligence.[55]

The Anguttara Nikāya deals with the healing aspect of gruel when it is drunk:

i. checks hunger
ii. keeps off thirst
iii. regulates wind
iv. cleanses the bladder and
v. digests the remnants of food.[56]

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burnt rice. ("*Āmisakhāraṃ'ti sukkodanaṃ jhāpetvā tāya chārikāya puggharita kharodakaṃ*"—*VinA*. v, p.1092). Therefore the English rendering 'raw lye' seems not satisfactory.

55 *Vin.* i, p.210

56 *A.* iii, p.250

Surgery and Anaesthesia

Surgery has been practised in the ancient world; India is no exception. Later in Europe it was considered a highly specialised job, but on the opposition of the Catholic Church it was confined only to barber surgeons until the Renaissance. In cases where traditional treatments failed, surgery was carried out and was successful. However in Buddhist monasticism monks were not permitted to have surgical operations on their private parts. Perhaps it may be due to the coarse methods adopted in surgical operations. A case is recorded in the *Vinaya,* where a monk got a fistula operated on by a surgeon called Akasagotta (Atri Gotra?) who made a sarcastic remark that the orifice of the patient was (as red as) the mouth of a lizard. With reference to this incident, while prohibiting monks to undergo surgery on the private parts, the Buddha is recorded to have said: "The skin, monks, is tender at the private parts, a wound is hard to heal, a knife is hard to guide." Following this incident and the doubts that had arisen in the minds of the monks later, the Buddha levied the rule: "Monks, one should not have surgery done *(sattha kamma)* within a distance of two fingers' breadth of the private parts nor *'vatthi kamma'*."[57] The word *vatthi* (skt. *vasti*) means the lower part of the abdomen, the hypogastric region of the abdomen. By way of explanation, the commentator Buddhaghosa has something to add in this regard. For, he says:

"Surgery *(sattha kamma)* and *'vatthi kamma'* means one should not perform any kind of cutting or tearing apart or piercing through or scratching with whatever instrument or needle or thorn or small knife or stone splinter or nail at the location. All of these are considered surgery. And also

[57] *Vin.* i, pp.215–6

oppression of the lower part of the abdomen through anal insertion of a leather strip or a cloth should not be done. All of these are *'vatthi kamma'*. In that case it is proper to apply alkaline or to wrap up the affected area with a cord. It is proper if it bursts by itself by that device. Surgery is also not suitable for those who suffer from hydrocele. Therefore one should not undergo surgical operations thinking that one would get cured by having the testicles extracted. Administering medicine to cure inflammation has not been rejected. With regard to the rectum, a plaster of medicine or bamboo shoots is appropriate, applying alkaline or pouring in medicinal oil can be done."[58]

With regard to other parts of the body, however, surgery has not been prohibited. For boils, treatment with a lancet has been enjoined, probably to burst the boil and extricate pus, followed by applying mustard powder, fumigation and cleansing with salt crystals. Undoubtedly surgery was considered a highly specialised profession in ancient India. Buddhaghosa while describing concentration, draws a simile to illustrate the steadiness, skilfulness and concentration required by a surgeon: "When a surgeon's pupils

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[58] *Satthakammaṃ vā vatthikammam vā'ti yathā paricchinne okase yena kena ci satthena vā sūciyā vā kanṭakena vā sattikāya vā pāsānasakhalikāya vā nakhena vā chindanaṃ vā phālanaṃ vā vijjhanaṃ vā lekhanaṃ vā na kātabbaṃ. Sabbaṃ hi etaṃ satthakammaṃ eva hoti. Yena kena ci pana cammena vā vatthena vā vatthipīlanam'pi na kātabbaṃ. Sabbaṃ'pi etaṃ vatthikammam eva hoti.... Tattha pana khāram vā dātum yena kena ci rajjukena vā bandhituṃ vaṭṭati. Yadi tena chijjati succhinnaṃ. Anḍavuddhiroge'pi satthakammaṃ na vaṭṭati. Tasmā anḍaṃ phāletvā bījāni uddharitvā arogaṃ karissāmī'ti na kātabbaṃ. Aggitāpan abhesajjalepanesu pana paṭikkhepo natthi. Vaccamagge bhesajjamakkhita ādānavaṭṭi vā velunālikā vā vaṭṭati. Yāya khārākammaṃ vā karonti telaṃ vā pavesanti"–VinA.* v, p.1093–4

are being trained in the use of the scalpel on a lotus leaf in a dish of water, one who is too clever applies the scalpel hurriedly and either cuts the lotus leaf in two or pushes it under the water, and another who is not clever enough does not even dare to touch it with the scalpel for fear of cutting it into two or pushing it under; but one who is clever applies the scalpel stroke on it by means of a balanced effort, and being good at his craft he is rewarded on such occasions".[59] When the Buddha's foot was injured by the splinter of the boulder hurled at Him by Devadatta, it was Jivaka himself who lanced and dressed the wound.[60]

The use of anaesthetics to anaesthetize a patient who is experiencing or has to experience acute pain is another aspect to be considered in surgery. By administering anaesthesia, distraction to modulate the pain pathway is done to provide analgesia. As an analgesic device acupuncture is said to have been used in China as early as 3000 B.C. Buddhism in China seems to have been influenced by acupuncture as an analgesia as well as a treatment for different kinds of afflictions. Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, is said to have used opium as an analgesia. Modern surgery is said to have its beginnings in torture cells set up by the Inquisition in countries like Spain. It is well known how war prisoners were subjected to surgical operations without anaesthesia for experiments in Nazi Germany during World War II.

The Pali texts do not betray any reference to the use of local or general anaesthesia in surgery.[61] Some herbs, strong

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59 *Vis.* p.136, The *Path of Purification,* p.141, iv, 68

60 Jivaka applied an astringent and bandaged the wound, *Vin.* i, p.279ff

61 See below on Jivaka

oil plasters and mixtures might have been used to counter pain in toothaches and other aches and pains. The external application of these drugs, just as the practice of native physicians today, might have resulted in temporary relief by distraction. In point of fact, Buddhism could not have had any objection to any step taken to alleviate human suffering whether mental or physical. It was because of this attitude medicine was introduced to monastic life and a system of psychotherapy has been followed to relieve pain, with Buddhism's emphasis on contentment and awareness.[62] On the contrary, even as late as the 19th century England, the Church is said to have attacked the introduction of ether and chloroform to ease labour pains on Biblical authority quoting the Book of Genesis: "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children";[63] a punishment on Eve and her female progeny for tempting Adam to sin. Until Queen Victoria was administered chloroform to relieve her labour pains in delivering Prince Leopold, the Church's opposition to anaesthetics seemed to have prevailed in England. In the *Satipatthana-sutta* a *yogavacara* is advised to be conscious of physical pains and focus his attention on pain. Attentive endurance seems to have acted as a sedative in those who have trained the mind.[64] The patient who is easy to be attended upon is considered a patient who is capable of enduring sharp, piercing and acute pain.[65] In another instance monks are instructed to strive to endure physical pain that has arisen, together with the destruction of unwholesome thoughts and

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62 See below on *Socialisaton for Death in Buddhist Perspective*.

63 *Genesis* 3: 16

64 *D.* ii, p.290ff.

65 *A.* iii, p.143

the development of wholesome thoughts.[66]

Medicines, Medical Instruments and Storage

With the medicalisation of the community some other problems connected with it had to be solved. In order to protect medicine from being stolen or left exposed to the ravages of nature, precautions had to be taken. Four places have been specified for storing medicine:[67]

1. A place by proclamation *(ussāvantika)*
2. A place connected to what is fortuitous *(gonisādika)*[68]
3. A place given by a householder *(gahapati)*
4. A place agreed upon by the community of monks *(sammuti)*

It is stated that when Venerable Yasoja was ill, medicines were conveyed to him and put outside, but vermin, cats, rats and iguanas ate them and also thieves carried them off.[69] Several auxiliaries were needed to prepare medications and administer different kinds of medicines. The lower grind-stone and the small grind-stone to grind roots and medicinal powders, a sieve to sift the powder. A nose-spoon to administer medicinal oil to the nose and medicinal plaster to apply on the affected area. For preservation of eye ointment an ointment box, a lid for the box, ointment sticks, a case for the sticks, a bag for both and a strap

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66 *A.* ii, p. 116

67 *Vin.* i, pp.239–40

68 The commentator identifies two of this category: *Āramagonisādika* and *vihāragonisadika*—*VinA.* v, p.1099

69 *Vin.* i, p.211

at the edge to keep the bag tied were to be provided. Sick-wards for those who had taken ill, food for the sick, mutual ethics for the patient and the attendant, the privileges that the patient and the attendant could enjoy and many other new measures came into existence thereby evolving a distinct medical set-up within Buddhist monasticism.

Patients and Attendants

All kinds of afflictions are considered suffering (dukkha) in Buddhism. Inevitably, all succumb to sickness one day or other. This may happen somehow or other due to any of the reasons given above. When the symptoms of a disease are minor, one is asked to strive (on his objective) before they worsen. When the disease has been cured, one must also think of getting back to striving.[70]

The sick are given special privileges by allowing them to ask for five standard medicines: Ghee, fresh butter, oil, honey, molasses and even sumptuous food such as fish, meat, milk and curd.[71] And also they are given the permission to express their opinion without participating in the assembly in person. Even a monk whose sole is split open is considered a patient and so is indisposed.[72] He is not to be asked to vacate his bed. It is recorded that abusing the privileges granted to the sick, a group of six monks claimed the best sleeping places saying that they were sick.[73] A sick monk is to be looked after. A monk who shares the cell must see to the welfare of the fellow sick monk, from pro-

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70 *A.* iv, p.333

71 *Vin.* iv, p.88

72 *"Gilānasamayo nāma antamaso padā'pi phalitā honti gilānasamayo"*—*Vin.* iv, p.74

73 *Vin.* ii. p.65

viding him with toothpicks and water to rinse his mouth as well as food and other comforts.[74] Further it is stated that there is no offence, if there is an undue estimate of oneself, if he is not intentionally putting forward a claim, if he is mad, if he is unbalanced, if he is afflicted by pain and if he is a beginner.[75] It is specifically mentioned that one who is afflicted by pain is also exempted from probation (parivasa) until he gets cured.[76] According to the Sigalovada-sutta it is a duty of the employer to tend to his employees when they fall sick.[77]

Tending the sick is considered a virtue as well as a responsibility for the rest of the monks. Among the ten qualities of a monk who should be conferred Higher Ordination is mentioned that he should be capable of attending on or having someone else attend on the sick.[78] Suppiya was named as pre-eminent in nursing the sick.[79] Visākhā kept on providing food to sick monks and also to the monks attending on the sick.[80] When a sick monk passed away the one who attended on him was given the robe and the bowl of the deceased through the sangha.[81] Once the nun Thullananda did not attend to an ailing nun who lived with her nor did she attempt to get her attended to. The Buddha, coming to know this, made it an offence of expiation.[82]

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74 *Vin.* ii. p.228

75 *Vin.* iii, p.100

76 *Vin.* ii, p.61

77 *D.* iii, p.191

78 *A.* v, p. 72

79 *A.* i, p.26

80 *Vin.* i, p.292

81 *Vin.* i, p.303

82 *Vin.* iv, p.290

The Buddha Sets an Example

Once a monk called Tissa suffered from an eruption which developed into sores. Hence he was called Putigattatissa, Tissa the Putrid. His robes were stained with blood and pus. As his whole body was stinking so badly nobody dared to attend on him. The Buddha who happened to see the sorrowful condition of the ailing monk, boiled some water, had him bathed and cleansed him with His own hands and made him comfortable. Afterwards Putigattatissa realised Arahanthood.[83] Another instance has been recorded in the Vinaya. Once when the Buddha was touring the monks' lodgings with Ananda, He came across a monk lying fallen in his own excrement and spoke to him. On questioning, the Buddha learnt that he was suffering from dysentery and asked him as to why he had not been attended to by other monks in the monastery. He was frank enough to reveal: "I, Lord, am of no use to the monks, therefore they do not tend me". Then the Buddha asked Ananda to bring water and sprinkled it on the ailing monk while Ananda washed him. Afterwards the Buddha assembled the monks and admonished them:

"Is there, monks, in such and such a dwelling-place a monk who is ill?"

"There is, Lord."

"What, monks, is that monk's disease?"

"Lord, the venerable one has dysentery."

"But, monks, is there anyone who is tending that monk?"

"There is not, Lord."

"Why do not monks tend him?"

"Lord, this monk is of no use to the monks, therefore the monks do not tend to him."

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[83] *DhpA.* i, pp.319 ff.

"Monks, have you not a mother, have you not a father who might tend you. If you, monks do not tend one another, then who is there who will tend you?" Then the Buddha announced the most significant ethico-religious statement which had its repercussion throughout Buddhist history: "Whoever, monks, tends me, should tend the sick". Further it was laid down if there is no preceptor or teacher or one who shares the cell or pupil or fellow preceptor or fellow teacher he should be tended by the Order for life.[84]

A Code of Medical Ethics for Both Attendant & Patient

As stated in the Hippocratic Oath modified in 1947 and accepted in 1965 as the International Code of Medical Ethics, a physician commences his career by solemnly pledging to consecrate his life for the service of humanity. As the Buddha himself symbolises the physician par excellence, a problem of medical ethics for the physician may not arise in the Buddhist context. Therefore, that a physician should be motivated by unreserved compassion in curing the afflicted is taken for granted. What is significant is, with reference to the foregoing incident, the Buddha laid down ethics for both attendant and patient which can be considered as an unparalleled innovation in the medical history of the world.

The attendant who tends the sick should be endowed with five qualities:

i. He should be competent in providing medicine.
ii. He should know what is beneficial and what is not beneficial and should take away what is not beneficial and bring forth what is beneficial.

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84 *Vin.* i, p.301–2

iii. He should tend the sick with amity of mind, not in the hope of gain.
iv. He should not become one who loathes to remove excrement or urine or sweat or vomit of the sick.
v. He should be competent to gladden, rejoice, rouse and delight the sick from time to time with right eous talks *(dhammiyā kathāya).*

The patient also must be endowed with five qualities. A patient having these qualities is considered easy to nurse:

i. He should know what is beneficial.
ii. He should know moderation in what is beneficial.
iii. He should take medicine.
iv. He should make clear his condition to the attendant who wishes him well whether he is getting better or worse or of the same condition.
v. He should endure bodily feelings which are painful, acute, sharp, shooting, disagreeable, miserable and deadly.[85]

What is more significant in the medical ethics laid down in Buddhism is, other than the physical attendance the attendant is expected explicitly to extend his emotional support to the patient and the patient is expected to gird up his loins and face the situation mindfully without losing his expectation for recovery. There seemed to be some monks appointed to see to the indisposed. They were called *gilanapucchakas* who went round, engaged in friendly conversations with and looked to the recovery of those who had fallen ill.[86]

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85 *A.* iii, p.143

86 *Vin.* iv, p.88, p.115, p.118

Moderation in Eating as a Health Measure

Due to the practice of strict asceticism for six years the Bodhisatta, being reduced to a mere skeleton, became very weak in both body and mind. At last realising that self-mortification would never contribute to developing a healthy mind conducive to penetrate truth he gave up self-mortification altogether and began to eat normal food. As enunciated later for monks, the Bodhisatta began to take food, "not for sport, not for manly vigour, not for beautification, not for adornment, but only for the sustenance of the body, to take non-delight in, to live the holy life, to destroy the past uncomfortable sensations (of hunger), to produce no new uncomfortable sensations (due to overfilling), for the continuation of the life process and to live comfortably".

In Buddhist monasticism, moderate consumption was considered a step to be followed for healthy and comfortable living. Herein not only having the temperament to avoid overfilling at the time of taking meals has been taken into consideration, but the food habit of one meal a day also has been taken into account. This fact has been brought to light in many of the discourses. Once the Buddha, addressing Bhaddali, said:

"I, monk, partake of my food at one session. Partaking of my food at one session I, monk, am aware of good health and of being without illness and of buoyancy and strength and living in comfort. Come; do you, too, monks, partake of your food at one session? Partaking of your food at one session, you too, monks, will be aware of good health, of being without illness, of buoyancy and strength and living in comfort".[87]

The importance attached to the eating habits of monks

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[87] *M.* i, p.437. See also *M.* i, p.124

is highlighted in another discourse which says that a monk who is proficient in the practice leading to the sure course of *Nibbāna* has three strong grounds for the destruction of the influxes; out of which the second is: moderation in eating. The first and the third are: keeping watch over the doors of the sense faculties and wakefulness respectively.[88] In another context, with the addition of the quality of perfect virtue, the monk who adheres to them is said to be incapable of falling away.[89] Perhaps it was Venerable Sariputta who tried to give a precise definition of the limit of taking meals. Sariputta says: "A resolute monk should drink water until he is full once he has eaten to within four or five mouthfuls of being full; this would be sufficient to abide in comfort".[90] It is stated that even the previous Buddhas had laid down moderation in eating as obligatory conduct for the monks in their monastic orders.[91] The Buddha expected the monks to follow the food habit enjoined by Him for the sake of their physical as well as spiritual well-being. For that matter, a monk is compared to a bird on the wing; wherever a bird flies, it flies only with the load of its wings. The monk, too, goes about wherever he wants, only with a robe to cover his body and with almsfood enough for his belly's needs.[92]

The Social Aspect of Monks' Eating Habits

It is interesting to note that there is also a social aspect

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[88] *A.* i, p.113 89

[89] *A.* ii, p.40

[90] *Thg.I,* 983

[91] *Dhp.* 185

[92] *"kayaparihārikena civarena kucchiparihārikena pinḍapātena"–* *A.* ii, p.209

to the concept of moderation in taking food. Once Ananda was criticised by Venerable Mahakassapa for touring with a company of as many as thirty young monks, reminding him of the disciplinary rule about 'eating by triad' *(tika-bhojana)*. According to the rule, the food has to be accepted only by three monks. The rule in question had been laid down by the Buddha for three reasons: (a) for the restraint of evil-minded individuals (b) for the living in comfort of well-behaved monks lest those of evil desires should split the order by means of a faction and (c) out of compassion for lay people. In view of the reasons given here it is quite clear that the Buddha did not want monks to be an extra burden to the laity on whose munificence they had to rely.[93] There are many more regulations on meals which were laid down with social concern. Among them ganabbojana, a joint meal; *paramparābhojana*, where a monk is invited first to take one of the five foods and then another; *atirittabbojana*, food left over from that which had been provided for a sick person, or too great a quantity offered on one occasion to monks and *anatirittabhojana*, the food that is not left over.[94]

The canon records an incident of how the Buddha persuaded the king Pasenadi Kosala to abstain from overeating. Once the king visited the Buddha just after a heavy meal, as usual. He was replete with puffing and was overwhelmed by drowsiness. He paced back and forth before the Buddha with a weary appearance. When he was questioned he confessed that he was uncomfortable after meals. Then the

93 *S.* ii, p. 218; *Vin.* ii, p.196

94 *Vin.* iv. pp.74, 78, 82, 84 respectively. See also *Vinaya* iv, p.75, for details *on niccabhatta, salākabhatta, pakkhikabhatta, uposathabhatta and pāṭipadika*

Buddha, pointing out that overeating causes suffering, said that if a man gave way to indolence, ate too much, spent his time in sleep and lay and rolled about like a great hog fed on grain, such a one would be subjected to birth again and again. While stressing that one ought to observe moderation in eating, He said: "If a man be ever mindful and if he observes moderation in eating his suffering will be slight. He will grow old slowly preserving his life".

The king's nephew, Sudassana, who had gone there with the king was asked by the Buddha to remind the king what the Buddha said when he (the king) was taking his meals, which eventually helped the king give up his gluttony and practise temperance in eating. By adhering to the advice given to him, he soon became slim, strong and healthy. Being free from obesity and lethargy which made him uneasy in carrying out his royal duties, he is stated to have exclaimed while stroking his limbs: "Ah! Surely for my salvation both in this world and hereafter has the Enlightened One shown compassion on me![95] Later, when the king expressed his satisfaction in front of the Buddha saying that his health had improved tremendously, the Buddha described to him four sources of happiness: gains in the form of health, wealth in the form of contentment, kinsmen in the form of trusted ones, whether related or not, and the Supreme Bliss of *Nibbāna.*[96]

Jivaka, the Physician

Jivaka was the royal physician of the Magadhan king, Bimbisara, yet he was in the habit of offering his services to the Buddha and the community of monks even to the extent

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[95] *S.* i, p.81

[96] *Dhp.,* 204

of neglecting his royal service, which Bimbisara condoned. He was a physician of many talents. He has been acclaimed as a pathologist, dermatologist, internist, dietician, proctologist, surgeon, as well as a botanical pharmacologist.

Jivaka diagnosed all physical complaints of his patients as accurately as an expert pathologist would, and cured them well, administering only one or two doses of medicine even to serious cases in acute pain. As stated in the *Mahāvagga pāli,* he earned a reputation as a dermatologist, too, and many patients who wanted to consult him were turned down by him because he was busy attending on the Buddha and the community of monks. Consequently, those who sought the best medical treatment, free of charge, then entered the order and when cured, disrobed and reverted to lay life. Jivaka, noticing this, in order to prevent the monkhood from becoming a haven for those afflicted with different kinds of infections, requested the Buddha not to ordain those suffering from leprosy, abscesses, eczema, consumption and epilepsy.[97] As an internist specialised in internal medicine, Jivaka was well respected. Once King Pajjota suffered from a kind of jaundice *(panduroga)* and on his request King Bimbisara sent Jivaka to Avanti. On arriving there he examined Pajjota carefully. Before him, physicians of great reputation had already attended on the king but they were not able to cure him. The king asked Jivaka to do whatever he could to make him well without ghee, because ghee was loathsome and abhorrent to him. But the king's disease was of such a kind that it was not possible for him to make him well without ghee. So Jivaka cooked up an astringent decoction and added the ghee mixed with various medicines, so that it might not

97 *Vin.* i, p.73

be recognised as ghee in colour or smell. As soon as he administered the decoction and before the king discovered that he was made to drink ghee, Jivaka left for Rajagaha as prearranged. After awhile, when the king realised that he had been given ghee to drink, he raged with anger and sent a servant to catch Jivaka and bring him back to be punished. On his way back home, he was caught up by the servant, however, he managed to proceed to Rajagaha. Later, Pajjota on regaining his health, sent an emissary to Rajagaha asking Jivaka to come back in order to receive a boon, which he declined saying that if His Majesty could remember his office, that much was enough for him.[98] On his way home from Taxila after the completion of his medical course, Jivaka cured the seven-year-old headache of the wife of a merchant in Saketa by just one treatment through the nose.[99]

He was also a proctologist as well as a dietician. Once King Bimbisara was suffering from an ulcer *(bhagandalābādha)* and his outer garments were stained with blood. The queens, seeing this, made fun of him saying that the king was having a period and soon he would give birth to a child. The king was very much ashamed and confided his affliction to Prince Abhaya. When Jivaka was informed of this by Prince Abhaya, Jivaka, concealing some medicine under his fingernail, went to see the king and diagnosed the disease and made him well applying medicine just only once.[100] Once, he administered a purgative to the Buddha when the Buddha was having a disturbance of the body

[98] Perhaps for another kind of jaundice, mud clinging to the ploughshare is prescribed to drink mixed with water. *Vin.* i, p.270

[99] *Vin.* i, p.272

[100] *Vin.* i, pp.273–4

humours of His body, by making the Buddha sniff in the medicinal powder sprinkled on lotuses and after the purge he asked the Buddha to take only the alms food of juice until the body became normal.[101]

His expertise in surgery is also described in the *Vinaya.* He correctly diagnosed the severe headache of a treasurer in Rajagaha and performed a brain surgery by strapping the patient to the couch on which he was lying. He cut open the skin of the patient's head, then opened a suture in the skull and drew out two living creatures *(pānikā)* and showed them to him. Then he fixed the skull, sewed back the skin of the head and applied an ointment. The treasurer was fully cured within twenty-one days.[102] Again, a son of a merchant of Benares while turning a somersault came to suffer from a twist in the bowels, so that he could not properly digest food or relieve himself regularly. Because of this, he became pale, wretched, yellowish, and veins stood out all over his body. At last when Jivaka was consulted, he put up a temporary operation theatre by putting up curtains and strapped the patient to a post, invited the patient's wife in, and turned other people away. Then cutting open the skin of the patient's stomach, drew out the twisted bowels and showed the cause of illness to the patient's wife. He then straightened out the twisted bowels, put them back correctly, sutured the skin of the stomach and applied an ointment along the cut. The son of the merchant of Benares soon became well.[103] He was also a botanical pharmacologist in the modern sense of the term. He had specialised in the medicinal qualities of herbs. After seven years of

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101 *Vin.* i, p.278

102 *Vin.* i, pp.274–5

103 *Vin.* i, pp.275–6

study under a teacher in Taxila, Jivaka sought permission to go home. Then the teacher asked him to tour a league all around Taxila with a spade in hand and bring back whatever he could, that was not medicinal. He toured as he was told, came back and reported that he could not find anything that was not medicinal. The teacher, being, highly convinced of his knowledge in botanical pharmacology, allowed him to leave.[104] According to Pali tradition he was called Jivaka because he was alive when he was picked up as an infant from the roadside by Prince Abhaya and he was called Komarabhacca because it was Prince Abhaya who adopted him and had him cared for. *Kaumarabhrutya,* as known in Ayurveda, the Indian science of medicine, is treatment for children or pediatrics. But we do not have any record of his treating infants. Most probably komarabhacca is the Pali derivative of *kaumarabhrtya.* As the fact that he had been adopted by the prince had been known to everybody, this popular etymology must have been given to the word.[105] All that he had earned on his way back home from Taxila by the treatment to the merchant's wife in Saketa; sixteen thousand, a slave, a slave woman, and a horse-chariot were presented to Prince Abhaya saying they were his first earnings, and insisted that he accept them as tokens for having had him cared for. But the prince did not accept them.[106] He was also a man of good humour who cracked jokes with the patients at times, giving them emotional support. He used his office generously with a liberal mind. He was a physician who took the Buddhist ideals of attendance on patients and compassion seriously and

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104 *Vin.* i, p.270

105 *Vin.* i, p.269. See also *The Book of Discipline I,* Fn. on page 381

106 *Vin.* i, p.272

put them into practice. Some of the disciplinary rules at the formative stage of the Buddhist monasticism were laid down on his request. It was Jivaka who asked the Buddha to relax the rule of wearing rag-robes and accept householders' robes.[107] The Buddha declared him pre-eminent among the lay followers loved by the people.[108]

Monks as Healers

Because of the emphasis laid on devoted attendance in caring for the sick, prescriptions and dispensing, monks were capable of acquiring expertise on traditional healing methods. Moreover tending the sick was encouraged with numerous privileges and proclaimed a virtue equal to tending the Buddha. As the *Vinaya* reveals, all avenues had been opened up for the monks to specialise in medicine, treatment and attendance to patients in monastic circles.

Although at the beginning, healing the sick was confined to the monks themselves, later it seemed to have gone out of the bounds of monastic obligations and monks seemed to have also attended on laity afflicted with diseases. It is specifically stated in the *Brahmajāla* and *Sāmaññaphala-suttas* discussing the minor details of morality, that these medical practices are wrong means of livelihood for brahmins and recluses who subsist on food provided by the faithful. In the discourses minor moral conduct envisaged in 11–25 deal with the abstention from medical care by monks for the laity:

11–14. Administering emetics and purgatives

15. Relieving the pain in the head by giving drugs to make people sneeze to clear the nasal passage

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[107] *Vin.* i, p.280

[108] *"aggaṃ puggalappasannanaṃ"—A. i, p.26*

16. Applying medicinal oil to people's ears
17. Soothing people's eyes by applying medicinal oils
18. Administering drugs through the nose
19. Applying collyrium to the eyes
20. Giving medical ointment for the eyes
21. Practising as an occultist
22. Practising as a surgeon
23. Practising as a physician for children
24. Administering roots and drugs
25. Administering medicine in rotation[109]

When Buddhism spread far and wide monks seemed to have deviated from the original assignment due to various reasons. Evidently, from the time of the Buddha, practising medicine as a profession has been discouraged as an infringement of monk's moral behaviour. But in later times, indiscriminate treatment to both monks and laity seemed to have become an issue in the monastic circle. Probably monks were concerned about faithful lay devotees who did not either get proper medical attention or who were not capable enough to provide themselves with proper medical treatment due to some reason or other. We do not know for certain whether they were motivated to treat laity out of sheer sympathy or because of personal gain.

Had they been motivated by sympathy to make use of their knowledge of medicine for the sake of those who had been their support throughout, as it seems, does not conflict with the minor details of morality listed above. In fact Rhys Davids while translating the *Digha-Nikāya*, observed this fact. For he says: "Objection was to recluses and brahmins

[109] *D.* i, p.12

practising medicine as a means of livelihood. They might do so gratis for themselves or for co-religionists and laymen might do so for gain".[110] Raoul Birnbaum, who has studied the subject extensively also has his own comment on this. He says: "…it is reasonable to assume that this is not a prohibition of the practice of medicine per se. Rather it is a warning against habitual treatment of laymen (especially for the sake of alms); a warning against becoming a doctor rather than devoting time to the spiritual exercises of early Buddhist practices".[111]

The monks who travelled from India and Central Asia to China between the 2nd and 4th centuries used their knowledge of medicine to heal non-believers. Eventually they embraced Buddhism. Many medical feats have been done by these missionary monks, which enabled them to approach all social grades and thereby introduce the Buddhist tenets to them.[112]

When we come to the 5th century A. D. some guidelines within the Theravada monastic system seem to have been levied to arrest the abuses of monks' medical knowledge. Because Buddhaghosa, in the *Vinaya* commentary commenting upon the 3rd Defeat, discusses at length by way of clarifying the issue. He presents four graded lists of patients to whom the monks can accord treatment without violating the rules of discipline. The following patients can be treated without restriction whatsoever:

1. A monk
2. A nun

110 *Dialogues of the Buddha, I,* p.26, fn

111 *The Healing Buddha,* p.7, Shambala, Boston 1989

112 Ibid, p.20 fn.11

3. A trainee nun
4. A novice
5. A novice nun

It is lawful to treat the following five receiving medicaments even by request:

1. Mother
2. Father
3. The attendant of parents
4. One's own attendant
5. One who awaits ordination *(pandupalasa)*

Then a list of ten relatives is given. Several conditions have been laid down to treat them:

1. Elder brother
2. Younger brother
3. Elder sister
4. Younger sister
5. Mother's younger sister
6. Mother's elder sister
7. Father's younger brother
8. Father's elder brother
9. Father's sister
10. Mother's brother[113]

The commentator, Buddhaghosa, supplies another list of patients to whom the monks are permitted to attend:

1. Visitor
2. Rogue

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[113] *VinA.*, II, pp.469–470

3. Leader defeated in battle
4. Pauper neglected by relatives
5. Villager[114]

It is stated that to treat even up to the sons and grandsons of the seventh generation of these ten kinds of relatives are permissible. Apparently, the commentator with these lists attempts to accommodate the prevailing practice of medicine by monks, with an awareness of social changes that took place in Buddhist monasticism. An examination of these lists in relation to archaeological remains found in Sri Lanka between 6th century B.C. and 12th century A.D. has been discussed by Venerable Mahinda.[115] The lists, virtually includes a wider range of laymen and thus makes the distinction merely nominal. Thera Mahapaduma who received some presents and three hundred gold coins as a gift for giving a prescription indirectly has been exonerated justifying the gift as the 'teacher's share'. When the queen of king Vasabha in Sri Lanka had fallen ill, a woman was sent to the monastery in order to get instructions for medication. Thereat the Thera Mahapaduma discussed the remedy for that particular affliction with another monk, which the woman overheard. The medicine was administered to the queen as woman overheard from the monk. The queen got cured. Then she being very much pleased sent some presents and three hundred gold coins as a gift to the Thera, which the Thera accepted as the 'teacher's share'.[116]

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114 *VinA.*, II, p.471

115 Recent Researches in Buddhist Studies—Essays in Honour of Y. Karunadasa, pp.454–465, Hongkong 1997

116 *VinA.* II, 471

Reflections on the Ten Perceptions as a Cure

"If indeed you, Ananda, having approached the monk Girimananda, would tell the ten perceptions to him, it would so happen that having heard the ten perceptions that illness of the monk Girimananda would immediately be cured."

"Sace kho tvaṃ Ananda Girimānandassa bhikkhuno upasaṃkamitvā dasasaññā bhāseyyāsi, Thānaṃ kho panetaṃ vijjati, yaṃ Girimānandassa bhikkhuno dasasaññā sutvā so ābhādho ṭhānaso paṭipassambheyya."

–*A.* v, p.108

3. Socio-Religious Significance of Buddhist Chanting

Chanting known as *'paritta'* in Pali and *'pirith'* in Sinhala is a very popular aspect of Buddhism having an important socio-religious significance.[1] As the Perfection is to be attained by the personal effort of the individual by practising the *dhamma* individually without relying on a saviour, it is sometimes argued that Buddhism even at its early stage was self-centred to the extent of becoming asocial. But *'paritta'* is one of the aspects of Buddhist practices which when examined as performed as a living tradition in Buddhist countries reveal its powerful impact on the individual and society and delineates its socio-religious significance as an effective Buddhist practice.

Psychological Support and Social Solidarity from a Functionalist Perspective

When we view Buddhism from the functionalist perspective of sociology, the role that Buddhism plays in society in bringing social cohesion by means of psychological support to its adherents is more real than apparent in the practice of Buddhist chanting.

Emile Durkheim, one of the earliest functionalist theorists of sociology has shown religion's function in sustaining social solidarity in any social system. The Buddhist stance on chanting, therefore, can be analysed from a sociological angle to see how far Buddhism is socially oriented to bring about togetherness and integrity in society. Chanting per-

1 Rhys Davids in his *Questions of King Milinda* uses the Sinhala word throughout.

formed in connection with the significant events of day-to-day life has enabled Buddhists to maintain social cohesion and the Buddhist identity even in modern society which is changing rapidly. Besides, just as much as the other world religions, Buddhism too provides the adherents with psychological support in their uncertainties, pains and sorrows. The support it has extended both morally and emotionally, which is called psychological support in sociological terminology, can be seen in Buddhist chanting performed not only on the occasions of birth, marriage and death, but also for tribulations and for every auspicious event in life as well. Chanting has been integrated into Buddhist life-style so strongly that it has become one of the most popular Buddhist practices among Buddhists all over the world.

In Buddhist households therefore, chanting is performed on every occasion of domestic importance in order to ward off evil influences and invoke blessings on the person or the party concerned. It is performed at childbirth, anticipating the safe delivery of the child and then follows every event of personal and social importance of a Buddhist. In this way most ceremonial occasions are marked with the monks' chanting of *paritta.* Whether it is laying the foundation of a building or a house-warming or a wedding it is customary for Buddhists to beseech blessings, from *paritta* chanted by a varying number of participating monks. The emotional boost it provides to the laity is obvious from the very enthusiasm they display at the performance. Annual ceremonial events of personal, social and religious significance are often celebrated with the co-operation and the participation of family members, well-wishers and sympathisers.

Besides, it is significant to note, in addition to medical consultation at the time of illness, *paritta* is chanted

for those who are indisposed, wishing their speedy recovery by the blessings supplicated on the power of the truth of the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha.* Venerable Piyadassi in his introduction to the English version of the 'Book of Protection' outlines the psychological impact of the performance of chanting on organic and functional diseases.[2]

Hence it is quite legitimate to assert that the Buddhist system of chanting has introduced a religious dimension of popular recognition of the laity in a way that they can participate actively in the practice and thereby contribute to the maintenance of social solidarity because of the psychological support that is extended by the performance.

What is Buddhist Chanting?

In Theravada Buddhism chanting is known as '*paritta*'. Etymologically it means 'Protection' (derived from *pari* + $\sqrt{}$*trā* to protect). Hence it is defined in the sense of providing protection in every way by the blessings invoked on the truths of the Triple Gem in general and on the truth of *dhamma* in particular.

In providing protection emphasis has been laid on several aspects of the *dhamma* in order to invoke blessings on those who are in need. It is to be stressed that these protective chants are not mystical compositions or any kind of mumbo jumbo with mysterious combinations of words and sounds. Nor are they magical formulas or talismans or exorcisms. They are original discourses which have been delivered by the Buddha and preserved in the Pali canon. The work popularly known as the 'The Book Of Protection' supposed to have been composed in Sri Lanka at an early period consists of discourses culled from the canonical

2 Ven Piyadassi, *The Book of Protection* p.12

texts and compiled mainly for the purpose of chanting.

These discourses have been recited as *parittas* or chants even during the time of the Buddha. Gradually when Buddhism evolved as a religion of the masses, Buddhist chanting became more and more popular among them due to its efficacy of providing protection by warding off sorrows *(dukkha)*, fears *(bhaya)* and ills *(roga)*. The fact that it had already penetrated into the Buddhist way of life by the 1st century B.C. is vindicated by the long discussion on *paritta* found in the *Milindapañha.*

On the whole, benediction is besought for a person or persons in consideration of several aspects of *dhamma.* In addition to the diffusion of loving kindness to all beings, thoughtful reflection on *dhamma,* invoking the asseverative power and genuine qualities of *dhamma* are recounted in these chants. Hence in the evolution of chanting as a specific Buddhist tradition, several aspects of invoking blessing have been taken into account in consideration of the particular situations that the monks and the laity had to face during the time of the Buddha.

Invoking Blessings by Permeating Loving Kindness

Perhaps the earliest phase of chanting is seen with reference to the preaching of the discourse on Loving Kindness *(Metta-sutta).*[3] The discourse is found both in the *Suttanipata* and the *Khuddakapātha* and prescribes radiating unreserved loving kindness *(metta) to* all sentient beings. The Buddha taught the discourse to some forest dwelling monks to be practised as a protective chant as well as a subject of meditation. The monks had been interrupted in their meditation by arboreal deities who tried to frighten the monks away

3 *Sn,* pp.143–152 and *Khp.* p.8

from their forest abode. These monks had taken their abode in the forest during a rainy season. Realising that the presence of these monks in the forest could be an unexpected bother for them, the deities who had made the trees their habitat took various demonic guises and frequently tried to frighten them away. The monks being terrified and disturbed in their concentration returned to Savatthi and reported the matter to the Buddha. Thereupon the Buddha taught them the *Metta-sutta* to be recited and its theme reflected upon as a subject of meditation.

On returning to the same forest they chanted the discourse while focusing their attention on its theme. It has been recorded that the deities who listened to the recital were appeased in their unfounded displeasure and thereafter provided guard and protection for the monks as long as they lived there.

The *Khanda Paritta* found in the *vinaya Cullavagga, Anguttara Nikāya* as well as in the *Khandavatta Jātaka* of the *Jātaka* collection instructs the forest-dwelling monks to pervade loving kindness to the four kinds of royal serpent families lest they should be bitten by them.[4] In the *Anguttara Nikāya,* it is named *Ahinda-sutta.* However, the *sutta* has been taught in connection with the death of a forest dwelling monk bitten by a snake. Although these four royal families have not been identified so far, they are also found in a Sanskrit manuscript belonging to an early period excavated in Kashaghariya in India.[5] Although the sutta in question speaks about loving kindness and the powers of the seven Buddhas it is named *Khanda Paritta* in the *Cullavagga.* This seems to have puzzled Lionel Lokuliyana, who compiled:

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4 *Vinaya* iii, p.107 and *A.* ii, p.72

5 Cowell, *Jataka* ii, p.100

"The Great Book of Protection" with the English version. For, while saying that it is difficult to say why it is called by that name he surmises that perhaps it has been named after a demon-serpent found in the Mahabharata.[6] But it is plausible to think that as the compilation of the Mahabharata is a few centuries later than the period of the *Vinaya Cullavagga* as well as the *Nikāya* works, it has nothing to do with the demon-serpent in the Mahabharata. The *sutta* might have been so named because it is a protection for the five aggregates *(pañcakkhandha)* which an individual consists of. However, as the *sutta* speaks of seven Buddhas in invoking blessings, it might have been redacted some decades after the rise of Buddhism.

Reflection on *Dhamma* for Blessings

Reflection on *dhamma* has been considered efficacious in relieving physical pains caused by severe afflictions. Even at the early stage of the dispensation the discourses dealing with the doctrine have been recited to bring consolation to patients by relieving their pain. The discourses named *Mahākassapatthera Bojjhangas* and *Mahāmoggallanatthera Bojjhangas* found in the *Saṃyutta Nikaya* have been chanted in order to assuage the painful feelings of those disciples after whom the discourses have been named.[7] As stated in the *Saṃyutta Nikaya* Venerable Mahācunda recited the discourse called *Mahācundatthera Bojjhanga* on the request of the Buddha when the Buddha was not well.[8] Yet in another instance when the Thera Girimananda took severely ill Ananda is recorded to have made him listen to

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6 Lokuliyana Lionel—*The Great Book of Protection,* p.26

7 *S.* v, p.61 and *S.* v, p.78

8 *S.* v, p.65

the discourse called *Girimananda Sutta* which he (Ananda) recited as he had learnt it from the Buddha.[9]

The psychotherapeutic effect brought about by the reflection on the Seven Constituents of Enlightenment *(satta bojjhanga)* and the Ten Perceptions *(dasa saññā)* is the most important factor in these particular chantings, which is nothing but the potency of the mind to wield its power over the body by thoughtful reflection on the doctrine.

Asseveration of Truth for Blessing

Asseveration of truth as a form of invoking blessing is also quite an old tradition by which Buddhism has offered benediction to those who practise the *dhamma* with confidence. Chanting is efficacious in conferring blessing because it includes truth. In other words, the *dhamma is* nothing but perennial truth. Whether the Buddhas appear in the world or not, the *dhamma* prevails in the world forever. It is the standing order of things and the way things happen. Therefore the asseverative power of truth is invoked to bestow blessing by chanting the discourses such as the *Angulimala, Ratana* and *Mangala* on specific occasions.[10] The *Angulimala Paritta is* an asseveration of truth taught by the Buddha to Thera Angulimala to be chanted for an expectant mother who was suffering from labour pains and the *paritta is* found in the *Majjhima Nikāya.* The *Ratana* is another of this kind, chanted to ward off the three kinds of fears that affected the city of Vesali. With all probability the Buddha visited Vesali on the invitation of the Licchavis in order to appease the fears that had been caused by non-

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9 *A.* v, p.108

10 *M.* ii, pp.103–104 and *MA.* p.747. *Sn.* pp.222–38 and *Sn.* p.278 also *DhpA.* iii, p.436

humans, plague and famine. It is recorded that at the Buddha's departure King Bimbisara went as far as the Ganges to bid farewell to Him. Therefore, sometimes the discourse is referred to by the name *Gangarohana-sutta.* Undoubtedly the language abounding in archaic forms and the contents of the discourse bear evidence to its genuineness. The last three stanzas of the discourse are said to have been uttered by Sakka in praise of the Triple Gem. The Buddhist Sanskrit version of the discourse is found in the *Mahavastu* under the name '*savstyanagatha*'.[11] It is interesting to note that according to the commentary the Buddha instructed Ananda on that occasion to go round the city together with the Licchavi princes and sprinkle the chanted water from the bowl of the Buddha.[12] The *Mangala is* a discourse delivered as an explanation providing a pragmatic interpretation to the concept of blessing *(mangala)* by way of an answer to a question put by a deity.

As all of these discourses are chanted to bestow blessings by way of asseveration of truth it seems that the limit imposed on selecting suttas to be chanted can be extended further to include any discourse of the Buddha. Virtually all the discourses of the Buddha deal with truth, i.e. the *dhamma.* Venerable Nagasena in replying to King Milinda gives an interesting anecdote to illustrate the power of asseveration.[13]

Blessing Through the Virtues of the Triple Gem

The virtues of the Buddha, *Dhamma, Sangha* and *Paccekabuddhas* are considered to have benedictive power. They symbolise the ideal virtues that a Buddhist can think of.

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11 *Mahavasthu* I, p.290

12 *KhpA.* p.162 and *DhpA* iii, p.436

13 *Mil.* I, pp.216ff.

Therefore the reflection on these virtues would destroy evil influences and bring blessing and happiness. So the chants such as the *Dhajagga, Isigili, Canda, Suriya* and *Mora* are chanted for protection and blessing. Except for the *Moraparitta* the rest are found in the canonical texts.[14] Naturally, when the faithful listen to the ideal good qualities found in the Triple Gem and the *Paccekabuddhas* he will tend to develop a strong feeling of self-confidence in himself.

The *Jinapanjara, Atthavisati Paritta, the Mahājayamangala, Jaya Paritta, Sivali Paritta* are later compositions in view of the language and the contents found in them. The composition of these chants seems to have been necessitated by the growing social and religious needs for alternatives to brahmanic practices in the subsequent centuries. Among them particularly the former two are chanted in anticipation of speedy recovery from ailments. The *Mahājayamangda* is considered a fitting conclusion for all the chants. While *Jayaparitta* involves success in every venture, the *Sivali Paritta* is chanted for prosperity. The *Mahāsamaya* and the *Āṭānāṭiya* found in the *Dīgha Nikāya* form a class by themselves. These discourses are recited to ward off non-human evil influences and invoke blessing. Both of these suttas therefore fall into a different category of chants and are often chanted to seek protection from non-human evil influences, on the power of the virtues of the Buddha.[15]

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14 Dhajagga S. i, pp.218ff.
Isigili M. iii, p.68
Canda S, i, p.51
Suriya S. i, p.51
Mora Jataka ii, pp.33ff.

15 *Mahāsamaya D.* ii, pp–253 ff. *Āṭanaṭiya D.* iii, pp.194ff.

The Efficacy of *Parittas*

Buddhists do not believe that chanting is omnipotent or efficacious for every occasion in every respect. The Buddhist stance on chanting and its efficacy has been nicely illustrated by Venerable Nagasena in his reply to a dilemma put by King Milinda to him. In his lengthy reply while elucidating the point he summarizes three fundamental reasons which nullify the efficacy of chanting:

a) If the person to whom the *paritta* is chanted for is to experience the evil effect of a weighty *kamma* he has done in this life or in a previous life, the chanting would not be effective for him *(kammāvaranata).*

b) If the person is engulfed in unwholesome defiling thoughts when the chant is in process, it will not be effective *(kilesāvaranata).*

c) If the person does not concentrate his mind and repose confidence in the Buddha, the doctrine and community of monks and the efficacy of chanting when he is being chanted for, the desired effect would not be achieved *(asaddahanata).*

Therefore when chanting is performed one is to be free from these defects in order to get the desired effect of chanting which is a fact accepted by Buddhists throughout the centuries. The socio-religious significance of *Paritta* chanting is clearly seen in the Buddhist countries where it is organised for three sessions (i.e., evening, following morning and evening) seven sessions, overnight, one and half days and seven days respectively with the participation of devotees seeking blessing.

In Appreciation of Nature

“O when will [break above my head]
The purple storm cloud of the rain,
And with fresh torrents drench my raiment in the woods,
Wherein I wend my way,
Along the Path the seers have trod before,
Yea, when shall this come to be?

Like creatures of the wild roaming at large
In the fair flowering jungle, so thou too
Hast gone up on the lovely cloud-wreathed crest
There on the mountain, where no crowd can come
Shalt find thy joy, O heart, for never doubt come
But thou shalt surely win to the Beyond.”

“Kadā nu maṃ pāvusakālamegho
navena toyena sacīvaraṃ vane
isippayātamhi pathe vajantaṃ
ovassate taṃ nu kada bhavissati.
Migo yathā seri sucittakānane
rammaṃ giriṃ pāvisi abbhamālimaṃ
anākule tattha nage ramissasi
asaṃsayaṃ cittaparābhavissati

—Tālapuṭa Theragāthā, Theragātha, p.372 and p.381

4. The Early Buddhist Attitude to Aesthetics

Some scholars are of the opinion that early Buddhism, being pessimistic and ascetic in outlook, is devoid of any kind of aesthetic appreciation. While totally rejecting this misconception, we shall examine how early Buddhism paved the way to evolve an aesthetic concept of its own in conformity with the world view embedded in the teaching of the Buddha Himself.

Ethics, logic and aesthetics are called normative sciences because they provide the principal norms pertaining to man's life. It will be possible for us to understand the correlation of art to aesthetics by examining the respective fields of these disciplines. While ethics, discussing the ultimate good, shows how it could be useful to human life, logic on the other hand analyses the concept of truth and discusses the ways and means of achieving that truth. Aesthetics, using the same criteria, deals with the nature, the concept and also the appreciation of the beautiful. Hence critical judgment about the beautiful also comes under the purview of aesthetics.

Wherever Buddhism spread, the norm of art was expressed in Buddhist concepts. Hence aesthetics was viewed in Buddhist perspective and the medium of art with which the concept of beauty was transmitted became essentially Buddhist. This is evident from the numerous art treasures found in Buddhist countries the world over.

Popularly, in traditional thought, aesthetics is closely related to art. Artists are the creators of beautiful things. Though the portrayals of some forms of life and nature are

recognised as works of art, they may not perhaps be beautiful, as that word is commonly understood, they may be mere portrayals devoid of any artistic value. The appreciative representation of form and content between a work of art and life is regarded as aesthetic and according to Herbert Read the function of artistic creation has been always to stretch the mind some distance beyond the limits of understanding.[1] Perhaps Charles Morgan, too, expresses the same thing in different terms by saying that art is news of reality not to be expressed in other terms.[2]

In regard to aesthetic appreciation two views are often discussed: the objective and the subjective. According to the objective view, beauty is in the object and aesthetic judgment may be true or false. The subjective view on the contrary maintains that beauty is something that an observer introduces into the object merely on personal preference. There are, of course, artists around us who by displaying an extraordinary skill are capable of drawing our attention to some intrinsic truths in life as well as in the objective world.

Apart from the work of art and objects, qualities of nature as well as some situations of life could be regarded as beautiful. For example, clusters of shining stars and the moon radiant in the midnight sky, cascading waterfalls and the rising sun over the still dark landscape, flowing rivers and streams, thick woods and groves, mountain peaks and slopes, all could be appreciative sights in nature, having scenic beauty. In the same way the physical structure, either male or female, represented with an intrinsic quality magnified, could also be beautiful. But obviously,

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1 Read Herbert: *Anatomy of Art.* p.68

2 Morgan Charles: *Reflections in a Mirror* (Second Series). p.91

they are not works of art created solely by the artist's imagination. Nevertheless, when both taken together, nature as well as the products of the artist, they produce aesthetic enjoyment in the observer by means of their intrinsic orderliness, symbolism and depth; which shows that there is a kind of criterion universally agreed upon. However, in the Buddhist concept of the beautiful there is an attitudinal as well as an objective aspect in what is beautiful.

Beauty and Religious Truths

What has been the attitude of Buddhism towards both nature and works of art? In Buddhism beauty is not for beauty's sake. It has been viewed as an incentive for those who aspire to the holy life. The Buddha on several occasions directed the attention of his disciples to beauty in order to communicate religious truths and as a medium ennobling the crude emotional feelings in them. The episode related in connection with Nanda, the Buddha's half-brother, as recorded in the *Udāna-pāli* is important in this regard. Nanda, who wanted to give up the training and return to lay life, was taken to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods by the Buddha who showed him five hundred dove-footed nymphs. The question put to Nanda by the Buddha in this context is pertinent to our discussion: 'Now, what do think, Nanda? Which are the more lovely, more worth looking at, more charming, the Sakyan girl Janapada Kalyani or these five hundred dovefooted nymphs?"

In order to compare the beauty of the nymphs with that of Nanda's former fiancee, comparative forms *abhirūpatara, dassanīyatara* and *pāsādikatara* have been used and Nanda then compares Janapada Kalyani to a "burnt she-

monkey with mutilated ears and nose" *(paluṭṭhamakkaṭi kannanāsāchinnā).* As the Buddha expected, Nanda was more fascinated by what was more beautiful.[3]

According to another episode, Bimbisara's queen Khema was infatuated by her own beauty and by seeing a far more beautiful nymph conjured up by the Buddha passing from youth to old age, falling down and dying before her very eyes, realised the vanity of her pride.[4] These two incidents reveal that the Buddha has given an ethical and spiritual dimension to what is beautiful.

Unity of Melody and Meaning

Artistic creations are either visual or auditory. Therefore the attitude to music and melody has to be considered in respect of the Buddhist attitude to aesthetic appreciation. By the time of the Buddha the original meaning of the Vedic hymns had been lost and mere recitals of the hymns had been conducted in Brahmanic circles for ritualistic purposes. Recitation and singing performed so as to bring out the meaning clearly have been encouraged in Buddhism. In this connection it is worthwhile to examine how the Buddha has commended Pañcasikha, the divine musician, when he sang some songs of love with similes drawn from *Tisarana.* Those songs, appearing in the *Sakkapañha-sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya,* have been translated into English by Prof. Rhys Davids in the 'Dialogues of the Buddha' and reproduced by Miss I.B. Horner in an anthology of poems entitled 'Early Buddhist Poetry'.[5]

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3 *Udāna* p.22 and *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā* i, pp.96105.

4 Conversion of Khema is related in the *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā* iv, p.57ff.

5 *D.* ii, p.265 ff.

Lady, thy father Timbaru I greet
With honour due, O Glory-of-the-Sun!
In that he wrought a thing so nobly fair
As thou, O fount divine of all my joy!

Sweet as the breeze to one foredone with sweat,
Sweet as a cooling drink to one athirst,
So dear art thou, O presence radiant!
To me, dear as to Arahants the Truth.

As medicine bringing ease to one that's sick,
As food to starving man, so, lady, quench
As with cool waters, me who am all aflame.

E'en as an elephant with heat oppressed,
Hies him to some still pool, upon whose face
Petals and pollen of the lotus float,
So would I sink within thy bosom sweet.

E'en as an elephant fretted by hook,
Dashes unheeding curb and goad aside,
So I, crazed by the beauty of thy form,
Know not the why and wherefore of my acts.

By thee my heart is held in bonds, and all
Bent out of course; nor can I turn me back,
No more than fish, once he hath ta'en the bait.

Within thy arm embrace me, lady, me
With thy soft languid eyes embrace and hold,
O nobly fair! This I entreat of thee.

Scanty in sooth, O maid of waving locks,
Was my desire, but now it swelleth aye,
Indefinitely great, e'en as the gifts
Made by the faithful to the Arahants.

Whate'er of merit to such holy ones
I've wrought, be thou, O altogether fair,
The ripened fruit to fall therefrom to me.

Whate'er of other merit I have wrought
In the wide world, O altogether fair,
Be thou the fruit thereof to fall to me.

As the great Sakyan Seer, through ecstasy
Rapt and intent and self-possessed, doth brood
Seeking ambrosia, even so do I
Pursue the quest of thee, O Glory-of-the-Sun.

As would that Seer rejoice, were he to win
Ineffable Enlightenment, so I
With thee made one, O fairest, were in bliss.

And if perchance a boon were granted me
By Sakka, lord of the Three-and-Thirty gods,
'Tis thee I'd ask of him, lady, so strong
My love. And for thy father, wisest maid—
Him as a sal-tree freshly burgeoning I worship for
such peerless offspring giv'n.

When he had finished his music and singing the Buddha praised him:

"The music of your lyre so harmonises with that of your song and the voice of your singing with that of your strings; that your lyre does not colour your singing too much nor your singing colour your play too much."[6]

As an artistic presentation, the harmony of music and voice so as to bring out the sum and substance of the

6 *"Saṃsandati kho te pañcasikha tantissaro gitassarena gitassaro tantissarena, na ca pana te pañcasikha tantissaro ativannati gitassaraṃ, gitassaro va tantissaraṃ" –D.* i. p.267.S

singing has been the subject of attention.

There is another episode in the *Udāna pāli* about Sona Kutikanna, an early disciple of the Buddha. On the instigation of the Buddha Himself, the *thera* recited the whole of the *Aṭṭhaka Vagga* in the *Sutta Nipāta* by heart. When the recitation was over the Buddha praised him: "Well done monk! Well done monk! Well got by heart, well considered and reflected on, monk, are these sixteen sections of the *Aṭṭhaka Vagga.* You are blessed with charming speech, distinctly and clearly enunciated, so as to make your meaning clear."[7]

Later, on another occasion the *thera* was declared chief of those who possessed clear and melodious utterance.[8] Herein, the phrase 'so as to make the meaning clear' *(atthassa viññāpaniyā)* is significant. What is essential is meaning, not the melody which is subordinate to the meaning conveyed. The *thera* is said to have recited the *suttas,* rhythmically organised as an aesthetic whole *(sarena abhani).*[9]

An instance where songs full of religious emotions had helped some sixty monks attain sainthood is recorded in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* commentary. By listening to paddy-reaping girls by the side of the road who were singing songs full of religious sentiments, those sixty monks are said to have attained Realisation.[10]

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7 *Udāna* p.51 ff.

8 *A.i,* p.24

9 Here the phrase is 'sarena abhani', which does not mean 'recited by memory' as Woodward puts it. 'Sara' is sound, voice or melody. See P.T.S. Dictionary. In this context 'sarena' (Inst. Sg.) means with intonation or melodiously.

10 The commentary on *Vaṃgisa Saṃyutta* in SA.

Illustrations from Nature

The entire *Puppha Vagga* of the *Dhammapada* illustrates Buddhist moral themes drawing on flowers as similes. The colour, fragrance and beauty of flowers have been compared to those themes emphasised:

> "As a lovely flower that is beautiful and scent-laden, even so fruitful is the well-spoken word of one who practises it".[11]
>
> "The fragrance of morality is the best of fragrances".[12]
>
> "The fragrance of the virtuous pervades every direction".[13]

In the, canonical texts references have been made in appreciation of nature. The moon,[14] the moonlit night and the moon unveiled from clouds have been drawn as similes to portray a superb sense of admiration.[15] The full moon in the full moon day, a full-bloomed lotus in a lotus pond,[16] a lonely elephant in the jungle,[17] a bird on the wing[18] are often found in the similes to exemplify issues of moral significance. A full-grown banyan tree providing shade and shelter for birds has been drawn to illustrate the magnanimous character of a believing clansman who has become a haven of rest for the many-folk, for monks and nuns and lay disciples both male and female.[19]

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11 *Dhp* 52

12 *Dhp* 54

13 Ibid

14 *M.* iii, p.327

15 *Dhp* 382. and *Sn* p.687

16 *M.* iii, p.133

17 *M.* iii, p.199

18 *M.* i, p.43, p.92, p.226 *D.* i, p.81

19 *A.* iii, p.42

The *Ratana-sutta* employing a very captivating simile compares the *dhamma* to 'a forest glade with flowery crests in the first month of summer' *(vanappagumbe yathā phussitagge gimhānamase pathamasmim gimhe).*[20]

There is an instance in the canon where the analogy of playing a lute has been drawn to encourage Sona Kolivisa on the Path. Sona Kolivisa, being unsuccessful in his constant attempts to realise any attainment, thought of giving up the robes and becoming a layman. The Buddha knowing this appeared before him and reminded him of his skill in playing the lute *(vīnāya tantissare)* when he was still a layman. And pointed out the fact that when a lute's strings were over-strung *(accāyatā)* or over-lax *(atisithilā)* it was neither tuneful *(saravatī)* nor playable *(kammaññā),* but when keyed to the middle pitch *(same gune patitthitā)* without either being over-strung or over-lax it was tuneful and playable. "Similarly," the Buddha continued to admonish him, "energy over-strung will end up in flurry, and energy over-lax will end up in idleness. Therefore you should determine equilibrium in your energy, penetrate equilibrium in your sense faculties, because you will then be able to be attentive to the object."[21]

The fact that sweet music produced by playing musical instruments is desirable is stated in another instance. Singing, dancing and clapping hands by a bevy of fairies has been compared to five kinds of well-attuned instrumental music properly played by a skilled artist yielding a sweet, charming, alluring, lovable and bewitching sound.[22]

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[20] *Sn.* p.233

[21] *A.* iii, p.375

[22] *A.* iv, p.265

Beauty and Desirability

The future passive participial form *'ramanīya'* (delightful) has been used to qualify some desirable places mentioned in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta:* Rajagaha, Veluvana, Vultures' Peak, Gotama Nigrodha, Corapapata, Sattapanni Cave on the slope of Mount Vebhara, Kalasila on the slope of Mount Isigili, Sappasondika Pool in the Sitavana, Tapaodavana, Kalandakanivapa in Veluvana, Jivakambavana, Migadaya in Maddakucchi, Vesali, Udena Shrine, Gotamaka Shrine, Sattambaka Shrine, Bahuputtaka Shrine, Sarandada Shrine and Chapala Shrine.[23]

The attractive patterns of divisions followed by farmers in their rice-fields in ancient Magadha has been the model of a Buddhist monk's robe. It was a delightful sight to see how the plots of land had been partitioned nicely with banks and cross-banks for irrigational purposes. This charming pattern of divisions suggested the design for stitching up the pieces of cloth of different sizes to make the robe of a monk. The innovation of the design gave a pleasant tailoring finish to the robe, the double robe and the inner robe of a monk which were formerly pieces of cloth just stitched together without any methodical system or set pattern. As recorded in the *Mahāvagga* when once the Buddha was proceeding towards Dakkhinagiri from Rajagaha he beheld a rice-field in Magadha divided into short pieces and in rows and in outside boundaries, enjoined Ananda to follow the same method in stitching up robes for monks. Later, the colour of the robe had to be determined as the robes had been badly coloured *(Cīvaraṃ dubbannaṃ hoti).* Cow-dung

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[23] *D.* ii, pp.116–7
Pāvam ca bboganagaraṃ-vesāliṃ magadhaṃ puraṃ pāsanakaṃ cetiyaṃ ca-ramanīyā manoramaṃ–Sn p.1013

and yellow clay had been used for dying. Thereafter, the Buddha enjoined six kinds of dyes, namely; dyes made of roots, trunks, barks, leaves, flowers and fruits of trees.[24]

A Buddhist monastery is a pleasant place to behold. When the treasurer of Rajagaha wanted to know whether the Buddha accepted monasteries the Buddha asked him to build pleasant monasteries and lodge learned monks there.[25] Even the toilets were to be colour-washed. Colours such as white, black and red were to be used, and the toilets were to be decorated with wreath work *(mālākamma)* creeper work *(latākamma),* bonehooks and bamboos and strings to hang robes on.[26]

Accusations levelled against the monks' behaviour by lay followers also depict the particular attitude towards beauty in early Buddhism. "Like those who go after sensual pleasures" is the recurring phrase found in the charges.[27] The *Chabbaggiyas,* or the group of six, went too far and decorated their monasterial apartments with imaginative paintings of male and female figures, which the Buddha disallowed to continue further, prescribing the representations of wreaths, creepers, bonehooks and cupboards instead.[28]

In enjoining the use of the spittoon, the sense of aesthetics seems to have mattered just as much as hygiene and sanitation. Some monks used to spit all over the newly prepared floor and as a result the colour of the floor was spoilt. Thereupon the Buddha prescribed the spittoon. Similarly,

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24 *Vin.* i, pp.287 ff.

25 *Tasmāhi paṇḍito poso-sampassaṃ atthamattano Vihāraṃ kāraye ramme-vāsayettha bahussute–Vin.* ii, p.147

26 *Vin.* ii, p.150

27 *Seyyathāpi nāma kāmabhogino*

28 *Vin.* ii, p.151

when the legs of the bedsteads and chairs made scratches on the newly prepared floor, the Buddha asked the monks to cover them up with floor-cloths. When new situations arose, more and more rules had to be promulgated in order to safeguard the pleasant appearance of the monastery. The monks used to lean against the newly prepared walls in their monasterial apartments and thereby spoiled them. The Buddha thereupon prescribed the use of a board to lean up against: but by constant use the board scratched the floor at the bottom and ruined the wall at the top. This situation led the Buddha to direct the monks to cover it at both ends with cloth. Casements were to be dusted, especially in the corners and joints. In the same way, the floor as well as the courtyard of the monastery were to be swept and kept clean.[29]

Objectivity and Beauty

By these references, it is quite clear that in Buddhism beauty is objective and real and not a pleasure projected to, or a concept superimposed on objects of perception. The monastery was to be kept clean and tidy. Monks were advised not to walk over the beds and chairs with wet feet or with unwashed feet or with their sandals on. Litter should not be heaped up and cobwebs and dust were to be removed with a duster.[30] Therefore according to the early Buddhist view, beauty continues to be an intrinsic quality of a thing. Whether anyone apprehends it or not, that property remains the same; but the underlying truth behind all these is marked with impermanence *(anicca),* unsatisfactoriness *(dukkha)* and non-substantiality *(anatta).*

[29] *Vin.* ii, pp. 152 ff.

[30] *Vin.* ii, pp. 175 ff.

Subjectively, beauty may create a sense of consciousness, an awareness, and an atmosphere conducive to purge one's sordid emotions. The Buddhist position is well nigh clear and the *Saṃyutta Nikaya* puts it in this way:

> "Thoughts of lust in man itself is desire and not the beautiful things themselves found in the external world.
>
> Let the beautiful things be as they are.
>
> The wise discipline their craving with regard to them."[31]

On another occasion, addressing the Venerable Koṭṭhita, the Buddha asserts emphatically that the eye is not a fetter to material form but that desire and attachment that arise because of the eye and the object is the fetter.[32] Perhaps the answer given to the brahmin youth Uttara, a pupil of Parasariya, is a most interesting remark in this connection. Uttara revealed that his teacher instructed pupils to develop their sense faculties by not seeing material shapes and not listening to sounds, etc; the Buddha lays bare the fact that then the blind and the deaf should have better developed sense faculties![33]

Sensual desire has been traced not to the beautiful object *(subba nimitta),* but to the unthoughtful reflection *(ayoniso manasikāra)* on the object that is beautiful.[34] Subjective

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31 *Na te kāmā yāni citrāni loke*
Samkapparāgo purisassa kāmo
Thiṭṭhanti citrāni tatheva loke
Ath-ettha dhirā vinayanti chandaṃ–S. i, p.22

32 *S.* iv, p.163

33 *M.* iii, p.298. Also see *Udāna* p.8

34 *A.* i, p.3

evaluation of an object in terms of permanence, happiness, beauty and substantiality is called an obstacle on the path to realisation. Therefore, it is the distortion of perception *(saññapipallāsa)* which has to be got rid of by perceiving objects as impermanent, unsatisfactory, repulsive and non-substantial,[35] because unthoughtful reflection of the beautiful results in lust.[36] Hence it is reiterated that the subjective appreciation of what is beautiful is instrumental in rousing lust *(rāga)* that has not arisen and developing further the lust that has already arisen.[37]

A beautiful object *(subba nimitta)* itself is not goodness nor rightness per se. Similarly, perception as it is, is neither good nor evil but the judgement based upon it turns to be good or evil. Buddhism advocates aesthetic experience congenial to a higher mode of living; it should be instrumental for moral perfection. Therefore the subjectivity involved in appreciating indecent performances and obscene pictures are not justifiable in the Buddhist sense of aesthetics.

This clearly shows that there is objectivity in nature. What matter is how one looks at those things. So the cultivation of the right attitude occupies an important place as revealed in the early Buddhist attitude to aesthetics.

When we turn to nature, there are numerous instances in the canon where beauty, grace and excellence of nature are portrayed with a superb sense of beauty, giving serenity and peace to the forest-dwelling mendicant. For it is said in the *Dhammapada:*

"Forests are delightful lodgings for those who are free from lust. They do delight there; but not those who go after

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35 *A.* ii, p.52

36 *A.* i, p.87

37 *A.* i, p.200

sensual pleasures."[38]

In the *Bhayabherava-sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* the Buddha agrees with what the Brahmin Janussoni has to say with regard to forest dwelling and says that the remote lodgings in forests and in woodland wilderness, are hard to put up with and aloofness is arduous. He further asserts that it is difficult to delight in solitude, because forests distract the mind of a monk who does not secure concentration. Here in the *sutta* no less than sixteen reasons are given as the cause of fear and dread for the forest dweller. At the end of the discourse the Buddha says that He frequents forest lodgings for two reasons, namely; for His ease here and now and out of compassion towards the folk that come after.[39]

Poets and Poetry

With regard to poetry, songs and music, too, the Buddhist attitude has to be understood in this light. In the *Anguttara Nikāya* we find a classification of poets where four kinds of poets have been differentiated:

i. *Cintā Kavi:* A poet who maintains his originality by giving expression to his imagination.
ii. *Suta Kavi:* A poet who is capable of putting into verse what he has heard. He is more or less a traditional versifier.
iii. *Attha Kavi:* A poet of didactic nature. He puts into metrical lines what is meaningful in consideration of its usefulness to moral life.

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[38] *Ramanīyāni araññāni yattha to na ramati mano vitarāgā ramissanti-na te kāmagavesino*

[39] *Attano ca diṭṭhadhammasukhaṃ sampassamāno pacchimaṃ ca janataṃ ca anukampamāno.–M.* i, pp.21 ff.

iv. *Patibhā Kavi:* A poet endowed with creative ability. He is an improviser who composes and recites on the spur of the moment. He is a poet of poetic vision and creates poetical compositions by just looking at things.[40]

Melodious singing at the expense of import is, however, not encouraged in Buddhism. The fact is quite clearly stated with reference to monks' companies where two kinds have been differentiated.

1. Companies trained in stormy and noisy talk but not in discussion by inquiry.
2. Companies trained by discussion.

The Buddha says the first kind of company is where monks do not listen to the discourses uttered by the *Tathāgata* which are deep in meaning, transcendental and dealing with the void. When they are recited these monks not only do not lend a ready ear but also do not even consider them able to be understood with an attentive mind and do not think of them as something to be learnt by heart or mastered. But when those tales, composed by poets *(kavikathā),* embellished with fair sounding letters and phrases *(cittakkharā cittabyañjanā),* composed by those who are external to the *dhamma,* are uttered by their followers, then they listen to their recital, lend their ready ear and consider them able to be understood with an attentive mind, as something to be learnt by heart and mastered. The second company is explained as being quite the opposite, that is, trained by discussion.[41]

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40 *Kavi-sutta –A.* ii, p.230

41 *A.* i, p.72

Attitude to Singing and Dancing

The attitude to arousing crude emotions by music, song and dance at the expense of meaning and morality is again highlighted in two other instances referring to singing and dancing, where it is said that singing *(gīta)* is lamentation *(ruṇṇam)* and dancing *(nacca)* is craziness *(ummattakaṃ)* according to the Noble Discipline. Therefore, what is sufficient for a monk in regard to both singing and dancing which are contributory to destroying the bridge (i.e. recurring existence) is to express the righteously derived pleasure just by smiling merely to show one's satisfaction.[42]

These two art forms have to be used to sublimate human emotions. What the Buddha wanted the disciples to adhere to in this regard can be understood through the Buddha's comment on Sona's recital cited above. With this in mind, one can assess such modern developments as Rock'n Roll, Strip Dance and other forms of Pop Musical Shows where high tempo and passionate rhythm movements are employed.

Rock'n Roll is a style of popular music resulting from the fusion of rhythm and blues with country music. Blues is considered to be a style of music that originated among African Americans marked by minor intervals and melancholy lyrics. Rock music later influenced pop (popular) music, which appeals to the young. *Pop* music is an admixture of not only rock music but folk and country music as well.

Pop singers emerged as a distinct class of their own using electronically amplified instruments, simple harmonics and heavy rhythm. The themes of their songs mostly dealt with the sentiments of love and lust; they seldom

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42 *Tasmā iha bhikkhave setughāto gite, setughāto nacce, alam vo dhamma pamoditānaṃ sataṃ sitaṃ sitamattāya. A.* i, p.261 compare with *A.* i, p.220

sang on happiness and grief. With the development of *Disco* which is said to have evolved in nightclubs for dancing to live or recorded music under special lighting effects, rock evolved further. *Acid Rock* is based on drug experience. *Hard Rock* is characterised by a strong rhythmic beat. *Progressive Rock* is marked with long instrumental solos and advanced harmonics. *Punk Rock* is an aggressive type of performance where heavy metal instruments are played with a pounding beat and a rhythmic chant. *Acid House* is a combination of different styles. All these groups use electronic instruments, strong beat and mostly perform in live shows. *Twist* is another kind of dance which is said to have become popular in 1960's. There the dancer, while remaining in the same place, twists his arms, legs and bottom in time with the noisy music. In *Strip Dance* the dancer, while dancing, undresses, throwing off her clothes one by one.

In almost all of these representations, song, music and dance are combined to create the desired effect which is mostly psychedelic, meant to cause an abnormal psychic effect. Electronically amplified instruments, strong beat and much repetition are devised to make the show effective.

Long Drawn Singing and Intoning

With reference to an incident involving the group of five monks, the Buddha prohibited the chanting of *dhamma* in a 'long-drawn singing voice' *(āyatakena gītassarena).* Five disadvantages of such singing also have been given:

1. One is joyously absorbed with oneself in regard to that voice.
2. Others are also joyously absorbed in regard to that voice.
3. Householders look down upon the members of the *sangha* saying that they sing as laymen.

4. While one striving after the accuracy of the sound *(sarakutti)* one's concentration is interrupted.
5. Later generations will tend to imitate them.[43]

Later when there was doubt in the monks with regard to intoning *(sarabhañña)* the Buddha permitted them to chant with intonation.[44]

Horner takes the former to mean 'long-drawn plain song sound'.[45] 'Plain song' as the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English explains is "a type of Christian church music for voices that sounds more like sung speech than like ordinary music". Singing or chanting referred to in this instance does not involve music in any form. It is more plausible to consider it as a long drawn singing voice which as stated in the list of disadvantages makes oneself and others to be absorbed and joyful with the sound alone. This is what the ordinary layman would do. Besides, one's concentration would also be interrupted by paying more attention to producing an accurate sound.[46]

Buddhaghosa says 'long-drawn singing voice' is improper pronunciation of letters affecting the mode of chanting. *Dhamma* is to be chanted in accordance with the sutta mode, *Jātakas* in *jātaka* mode and stanzas in *gāthā* mode. Avoiding prolonged drawing, chanting has to be performed in regular mode *(caturassena vattena) so* as to make the words and syllables well articulated *(parimanḍalāni padabyañjanāni dassetabbāni)*".

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43 *Vin.* ii, p.108

44 Intoning is mentioned with reference to Sona Kutikanna's recitation of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* in front of the Buddha which is repeated in *Vin.* ii, p.300.

45 *Book of Discipline V*, p.146

46 *Sarakuttim'ti sarakiriyam*–Quoted by Oldenberg in *Vin.*ii,p.316

Explaining 'intoning' he says that it is the chanting voice. He refers to thirty-two modes such as the wave mode, the *keta* mode, the dripping mode etc., and says that one can use whichever mode from among them but in a befitting manner to recluses and without destroying the words and syllables by wrong articulation".[47]

Chanting Together (Sangayana)

Chanting together as a means of preserving dhamma was conceived in the minds of the early disciples. The discourses *Sangiti* and *Dasuttara* said to have been delivered by Sariputta are more like classification prototypes of indices of dhamma which serve the purpose of committing dhamma to memory.[48] In fact *sangayana* is called a council because the classification of the dhamma and vinaya and the chanting together of the same were conducted in those assemblies of monks.

Song in *Dhamma* but not *Dhamma* in Song

Those who observe either eight or. ten precepts are expected to abstain from contortions *(visūkadassanā)* of dancing, singing and music. Buddhaghosa, commenting on the word 'singing' in the precept, says that adapting the *dhamma* to song is not suitable but adapting song to the *dhamma* is suitable.[49] What he means is quite clear from the foregoing discussion about the Buddhist attitude to singing and chanting. The *dhamma* should not be dis-

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47 *Sarabhaññam'ti sarena bhananaṃ*–Both passages are translations of the *Vin*A. quoted by Oldenbery in *Vin.* ii, p.316

48 *D.* iii, pp.207ff. and pp.272ff.

49 *Dammūpasaṃhitaṃ vā'pi ce'ttha gitam na vaṭṭati, gitūpasamhito pana dhammo vaṭṭati.*–*Kh.A.* p.36

torted in adapting it to singing and music. But music and singing can be adapted to suit the *dhamma* with its fervour intact.

Beauty as a Relative Phenomenon

When sociologically viewed, beauty is a relative phenomenon differing from culture to culture. The criterion of beauty may vary from society to society. What may be considered as beautiful, attractive and appreciative in one culture may be considered as strange and vulgar in another. The concepts of male and female (physical) beauty are also different in different cultures due to cultural diversity. Over-ornamentation and decorative motifs used in buildings by a particular religious group might not be appreciated by another religious group. Sociologists are mainly concerned about the relative nature of beauty.

The Buddha's analytical approach to sensual attractiveness of physical form, voice, smell, taste and touch of womenkind to men and vice versa found in the beginning of *Anguttara Nikāya* is not a case of aesthetic attraction but it is to be considered as a graphic remark on sensual stimulation between the sexes.

Rapture and Gladness

In fact, rapture and gladness *(pītipāmojja)* as well as happiness *(sukha)* normally considered to be derived from aesthetic experience have been classified into three different grades according to the planes where they are experienced.

1. Rapture that is carnal *(sāmisā pīti)*
2. Rapture that is spiritual *(nirāmisā pīti)*
3. Rapture that is even more spiritual *(nirāmisatarā pīti)*

The first is carnal rapture based on material and worldly

pleasure derived through desirable *(iṭṭhā),* alluring *(kantā),* delightful *(manāpā),* dear *(piyarūpā),* passion-fraught *(kāmūpasaṃhitā)* and attractive *(rajanīyā)* objects. The second is a characteristic of the first and the second meditative absorptions. The third state arises in the mind of an Arahant who has dried up all cankers through insight *(sukkhavipassaka)* and who realises that he is released from lust, hatred and delusion.

Likewise, happiness also has been classified into three as carnal, spiritual and more spiritual. The first arises due to external sense stimulation as the above. The second is found in the first, second and the third meditative absorptions. The third originates in the mind of the Arahant who has dried up all cankers through insight and realises that he is released from lust, hatred and delusion.[50] The second, spiritual rapture, is also one of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, because it helps one to be energetic and enthusiastic on the Path. *Pāmojja* or *pāmoda* often coupled with rapture *(pīti)* denotes joy or gladness. It is stated that one who is filled with joy will make an end of suffering.[51] Spiritual rapture and joy arise as a concomitant result of the reflection on the rise and fall of the aggregates realising that it is the way to Deathlessness.[52]

Therefore it is said in the *Dhammapada:*

> "A monk filled with joy, full of confidence in the Buddha's teaching will attain the peaceful state, the cessation of the conditioned, the Bliss."[53]

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50 *S.* iv, p.235

51 *Dhp.* 376

52 *Dhp.* 374

53 *Dhp.* 381

The commentary on the *Dhammapada,* however, identifies five kinds of raptures:

1. Slight sense of rapture *(khuddakā pīti).*
2. Momentary rapture *(khanikā pīti).*
3. Flood of rapture *(okkantikā pīti).*
4. Thrilling rapture *(ubbegā pīti).*
5. Suffusing rapture *(pharanā pīti).*[54]

Nature Appreciated

To the monk who is not in pursuit of sensual pleasures, forests with its flora and fauna is a delightful lodging. To this effect numerous instances could be cited from the *Theragāthā* of the Pali canon. For instance, this is how Thera Mahākassapa spoke in praise of the natural surroundings in the forest where he spent most of his life:

"Those upland glades delightful to the soul,
Where the kareri spreads its wildering wreaths,
Where sound the trumpet call of elephants:
Those are the rocks where in my soul delights.
Those rocky heights with hue of dark blue clouds,
Where lies embossomed many a shining tarn

Of crystal clear, cool waters, and whose slopes
The herds of Indra cover and bedeck:
Those are the rocks wherein my soul delights."[55]

Yet another monk called Bhuta speaks thus:

"When in the lowering sky thunders the storm-
cloud's drum,
And all the pathways of the birds are thick with rain,
The brother sits within the hollow of the hills,

54 *DhA.* ii, p.118

55 *Psalms of the Early Buddhists*–Brethren p.363–4.

Rapt in an ecstasy of thought: no higher bliss
Is given to me than this.
Or when by rivers on whose banks together crowd
Garlands of woodland blossoms bright with many a hue,
With heart serene the brother sits upon the strand,
Rapt in an ecstasy of thought: no higher bliss
Is given to me than this."[56]

Kaludayi, the minister who was said to have been born on the day Prince Siddhattha was born, was the last to be sent to invite the Buddha to Kapilavatthu, the hometown of the Sakyans. He was ordained and after becoming an Arahant he is said to have sung the following verses praising the natural beauty of the homeward journey.

"Now crimson glow the trees, dear Lord, and cast
Their ancient foliage in quest of fruit.
Like crests of flame they shine irradiant,
And rich in hope, great Hero, is the hour.

Verdure and blossom-time in every tree,
Where'er we look delightful to the eye,
And every quarter breathing fragrant airs,
While petals falling, yearning comes for fruit:

'This time, O Hero, that we set out hence.
Not over hot, nor over cold, but sweet,
O Master, now the season of the year.
O let the Sakiyans and Koliyans
Behold thee with thy face set towards the West,
Crossing the border river Rohini.

In hope the field is ploughed, in hope the seed is sown,
In hope of winning wealth merchants fare over sea.

[56] Ibid p.247

The hope I cherish, may that hope be realised!"[57]

Yet another Thera called Ekavihariya is fascinated by the surroundings of the jungle, cool air, fragrance of flowers, mountain cliffs and flower carpets and directs his mind towards the bliss of emancipation.

"I'll seat me on the mountain-top the while,
The wind blows cool and fragrant on my brow,
And burst the baffling mists of ignorance.

Then on the flower carpet of the wood,
Anon in the cool cavern of the cliff,
Blest in the bliss of Liberty I'll take
Mine ease on the old Fastness o' the crag."[58]

On the whole some of these Theras were not interested in solitary confinement in a monastic cell, but sought the solace away in a forest dwelling. Sappaka admires his surrounding and sees the beauty of cranes on the wing, thunder, storm-cloud, flowing water of the river Ajakarani, clustered rose-apple trees. He exhibits his love of retirement by appreciating the environment of his forest dwelling.

"Whene'er I see the crane, her clear bright wings
Outstretched in fear to flee the black storm cloud,
A shelter seeking, to safe shelter borne,
Then doth the river Ajakarani
Give joy to me.

Whene'er I see the crane, her plumage pale
And silver white outstretched in fear to flee
The black storm cloud, seeing no refuge high,
The refuge seeking of the rocky cave,

[57] Ibid p.250

[58] Ibid p.253

Then doth the river Ajakarani
Give joy to me.

Who does not love to see on either bank
Clustered rose-apple trees in fair array.
Behind the great cave (of my hermitage)
Or hear the soft croak of the frogs, well rid
Of their undying mortal foes proclaim:

Not from the mountain streams isn't the time today
To flit. Safe is the Ajakarani.
She brings us luck. Here is it good to be."[59]

The uniqueness of the early Buddhist attitude to aesthetics lies in this fact. Buddhism, denouncing sensualism, appreciates beauty natural or man-made. It does not fall to a lower level, but reaches a higher level characterising its noble ideal, *Nibbāna.*

Climax–The Sentiment of Release

In the earliest division of the word of the Buddha into nine limbs *(navanga),* there are three literary types connected with rhythm, rhyme and meter: *geyya* is what should be sung while *gāthā* is a metrical composition. *Udāna* being a paean of joy, is often a versification of an emotional utterance. All these as the repertoire found in the *Thera-Theri Gāthā* are cathartic in content and as well as in objective. These sentiments, expressed by way of compassion, loving kindness, heroism or peace, reach their climax in the Sentiment of Release *(vimutti rasa)* leading to Realisation.[60]

The word sentiment, *(rasa)* has a twofold connotation: physiological and psychological. Sentiment derived through

[59] Ibid p.187

[60] *M.* i, p.133, A. ii, p.133, p.178

and originated by means of either visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory or tactile experience is physiological and can be generally rendered as 'taste'. But on the other hand 'Sentiment of Release' is explained in the scriptures as that which induces one to attempt the onward march of pilgrimage to realisation. The fact has been pretty well explained using visual imagery: "Even as monks, in Jambudipa, trifling number are the pleasant parks, pleasant groves, pleasant grounds and lakes while more numerous are the steep precipitous places, unfordable rivers, dense thickets and of stakes and thorns and inaccessible mountains, even so many are they who are not the receivers of the Sentiment of Import *(attharasa),* the Sentiment of Dhamma *(dhammarasa)* and the Sentiment of Release *(vimuttirasa).* Therefore I admonish you to be the receivers of those Sentiments."[61]

The apex of both the first two Sentiments is nothing but the Sentiment of Release.

While explaining the wonders of the dispensation allegorically, the Buddha made this fact clear to Paharada. Comparing the eight wonders of the great ocean to the doctrine and discipline *(dhamma vinaya)* the Buddha said that just as much as the water in the great ocean smacks of salt, so do the doctrine and discipline smack of the Sentiment of Release, which by seeing constantly, the monks derived pleasure in the doctrine and discipline.[62]

When taken as a whole, the mode of teaching in the *sutta pitaka* of the Pali canon is named *pariyāya desanā* contrasted to the *nippariyāya desanā* of the *abhidhamma pitaka.*[63] Since the *suttas* or the discourses which have

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61 *A.* i, p.35–5

62 *A.* iv, p.203

63 *Vism.* p.473

adopted an applied method of illustration by way of similes, metaphors, anecdotes and images amounting to figurative expressions, are discursive in presentation as opposed to the abstract and impersonal language of the abhidhamma pitaka. Hence it is not difficult to find literary devices such as propriety *(aucitya)*, suggestion *(dhvani)* and the like in the discourses of the *nikāya* works. What is significant is that these devices have not been used for the sake of artificial embellishment and beautification as we find in Sanskrit prose and poetry, but to illustrate and elucidate the theme of discussion with the ultimate objective of realisation.

Theories of Suggestion and Propriety

Indian literary critics continued to introduce literature by the word *kāvya*. Therefore a *kāvya* may be either prose or poetry or a representation of both mixed. According to them the purpose of literature is appreciation that results in sentiments *(rasa)*, a theory actually formularised by Bharata Muni with reference to the appreciation of drama. The theory was later extended to the appreciation of all literary forms and a long line of literary critics came out with numerous theories of literature and founded different schools of literary criticism. Among them Anandavardhana who founded the school of suggestion and Ksemendra who elaborated the theory of Anandavardhana from a different angle and named it propriety or appropriateness. They are considered to have made significant contributions to the subject in this regard.

According to Vāmana, another critic, the soul of literature is style;[64] Dandin, yet another, says that literature is

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64 *'Ritirātmā kāvyasya'. 'Vis'ista padaracanā ritih'. Vis'eso gunātmā' – Kavyalankara Sutra*

string of words where the writer's purposeful objective has been presented uninterrupted.[65] Bhamaha defined literature as the blend of word and meaning.[66] Kalidasa's famous simile of *ardhanārishvara* illustrating the point explains *ardhanāri* as *Umā,* the consort of Ishvara symbolising *vāc* or speech, *ishvara* is meaning. Hence unity of word and meaning is literature. The exponents of the school of suggestion beginning from Anandavardhana maintain that the soul of literature is suggestion *(dhvani).*[67] Ksemendra supplementing the theory as it were, says that there is no other cause more disastrous to sentiments than the lack of propriety.[68] Anandavardhana, however, identifies two senses of suggestion: Expressed *(vdcya)* and implied *(pratiyamdna).* The implied sense is more important, so what is expressed should contribute to what is implied on the whole, which is the suggested. Sounds of words *(sabda dhvani)* that are being used should enhance the suggested meaning *(artha dhvani)* of a literary composition.

Aesthetic Value of Pali Literature at a Glance

Setting aside all the minute expositions laid down by the schools of suggestion and propriety when we take an overview of Pali literature, both canonical and non-canonical, it is not difficult to see examples for these poetical theories of literary criticism. With copious similes and metaphors drawn from many and varied fields together with the usage

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65 *'Istārtha vyavacchinnā padāvali' –Kavyadarsa*

66 *'Sabdarthau sahitau kāvyam' –Kavyalankara*

67 *'Kavyasya atmā dhvanih' –Dhvanyāloka*

68 *'Anaucityādrtenānyād rasabhangasya kāranaṃ prasiddhaucityabandhastu rasasyopanisadparā' –Aucityavicāra Carca*

of parables, anecdotes, fables and pithy sayings, appealing to the reader's power of imagination, as a whole the literary value of Pali literature is admirable.

The poetical merits of the very first stanza uttered by the Buddha immediately after His Enlightenment can be appreciated as a fine piece of poetry. Subtle Buddhist concepts of the cycle of existence, defilements, ignorance, craving, suffering, unconditionality and rebirth have been made tangible by an alluring imagery. The charm of the paean of joy lies in the fact of its blending with the trend of the conceptual form brought to light at the end, leaving an indelible impression in the mind of the reader. As a literary piece it can be appreciated highly applying the criteria of both suggestion and propriety.

It runs thus:

> "Through many a birth I wandered in *samsāra,*
> seeking but not finding, the builder of the house.
> Sorrowful is it to be born again and again."
>
> "O house-builder! Thou art seen. Thou shalt build no house again. All thy rafters are broken. Thy ridge-pole is shattered. My mind has attained the unconditioned. Achieved is the end of craving."[69]

The simile of the house-builder has been interwoven into the verse admirably in order to bring out subtle doctrinal themes but without employing any abstract philosophical terminology.

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69 *Anekājati saṃsāraṃ—sandhāvissaṃ anibbisaṃ*
gahakārakath gavesanto—dukkhājāti punappunaṃ
Gahakāraka diṭṭhosi—punagehaṃ nakāhasi
sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā—gahakūṭaṃ visankhitaṃ
visaṃkhāragataṃ cittaṃ—tanhānaṃ khayaṃ ajjhagā'
–*Dhp.* 153, 154

The very first stanza of the *Dhammapada* is another striking example to this effect. For, it is said there:

"Mind is the forerunner of all evil states. Mind is chief; mind made are they. If one speaks or acts with wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the ox yoked to the cart."[70]

The ill effect of evil *kamma* has been portrayed here with an apt simile appealing to the power of imagination of the reader. Just as the wheel of the cart that follows the hoof of the ox that is yoked to the cart, evil consequences will come after the evil-doer. The ox as a beast of burden destined to carry a cart load of goods here and there, now uphill and now downhill under the threat of a driving stick, experiencing physical torture with so much of pain, stress and suffering. How the dumb animal succumbs to the situation is a common sight in third world countries. The rope drawn through the aperture made for the purpose on the nose of the ox is used as brakes to the cart making the animal to turn its head back while yoked. Iron horseshoes have been nailed to the hooves until they are worn out and replaced by new ones. Castration by crushing the testicles is another torturous procedure followed–to turn it to be a beast of burden. The ownership of the beast is displayed by branding it with a red-hot iron rod. The stanza with the simile of the ox yoked to the cart creates a visual image in the mind of the reader as to how a similar fate is to be expected by an evil-doer. Hence it is suggestive as well as appropriate as an admirable literary piece.

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70 *'Manopubbangamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā*
manasā ce paduṭṭhena bhāsati vā karoti vā
tato naṃ dukkhaṃ anveti cakkaṃ 'va vahato padaṃ' –Dhp. 1

When taken as a unit by itself the stanza, by using a very pertinent and telling simile, lays bare the fate of those who speak or act with wicked mind and leaves the imprint of enormous misery in their minds of that which they have to undergo in time to come.

The flickering nature of the mind is aptly depicted by the drawing the simile of a fish out of water in another instance:

"Like a fish that is drawn from its watery abode and thrown upon land, even so does this mind flutter. Hence should the domain of Mara (the realm of the passions) be shunned".[71]

The simile makes the nature of the mind more explicit. How the mind jumps from one object to another is depicted by the simile of the floundering fish on land which is in the grip of death. The mind that jumps from one object to another in search of enjoyment is within the domain of the Evil One. The stanza convinces the reader to attempt to go beyond *Mara's* domain.

Literary devices used in both canonical prose and verse are efficient in creating an impact in the thoughtful reader. Intermingled with suggestive similes and words, canonical verse together with the *Jātaka* tales occupy a unique position in the terrain of literary appreciation. Refrain is another literary device used in the canon to impress on the mind of the reader the sum and substance of a theme emphasised.

For example:

"Atha ce patthyasi pavassa deva" –Dhaniya sutta[72]

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[71] *'Vārijo'va thale khitto –okamokata ubbhato pariphandati'daṃ cittaṃ– māradheyyaṃ pahātave' –Dhp. 34*

[72] *Sn.* p.3

"Eko care khaggavisana kappo" –Khaggavisana Sutta[73]
"Taṃ parābhavato mukham" –Parabhava Sutta[74]
"Taṃ jaññā vasalo iti" –Vasala Sutta[75]
"Etaṃ mangalaṃ uttamaṃ" –Mahamangala Sutta[76]
"Etena saccena suvatthi hotu" –Ratana Sutta[77]

As a forceful literary device, refrain has been used in folk songs in many countries of the world.

The non-canonical works such as *Dāthāvansa, Jinacarita, Jinālankāra, Hatthavanagalla-viharavaṃsa* supply us with many compositions using words complementary to sound effect on the import conveyed. The following stanza taken from *Hatthavanagalla-viharavaṃsa* is a fine example characterising the demon Rattakkhi who visited the island of Lanka.

"Jaṭhara piṭhara bhārakkhantavankorujānu
sajala jalada kūtākārasororukāyo
kuṭhila kaṭhina dāthākoṭi sandaṭṭha gando
navadivasakarakkho rakkhaso dīpamāga"[78]

Aspirated and unaspirated cerebrals and other aspirates together with trills used in the stanza make the sound effect correspond to the characterisation of the demon with its ferocious appearance.

A poet capable of creating poetic images in a perspective of his own and particular to himself with originality

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73 *Sn.* p.6

74 *Sn.* p.18

75 *Sn.* p.21

76 *Sn.* p.46

77 *Sn.* p.39

78 See *Hatthavanagalla-vihāravaṃsa* for further examples

in creation is called a poet of high calibre. This ingenuity is called *pratibhā* (Pali: *paṭibhā)* in Sanskrit poetics.[79] Dhammakitti, by describing the miracles performed by the Tooth Relic, in several places of his poem *Dāthāvaṃsa* creates visual pictures in the mind of the reader with dexterity displaying a poetic diction unparalleled in non-canonical Pali poetry. The three miracles described in the third chapter make the reader spellbound and causes his devotion to rise to a high tempo. The purpose is 'creating serene joy and pious emotion in the virtuous' *(sādhujana pasāda samvega janana).* For instance, the appearance of nagas to worship the relic in mid ocean is presented with a fine thought of imagination:

> *"Salalita ramaniyam keci naccaṃ karontā*
> *salayamadhuragītaṃ gāyamānā'va keci*
> *pacura turiya bhaṇḍe āhanantā'va eke*
> *munivaratanudhātuṃ pūjituṃ uṭṭhahiṃsu"*
>
> —*Dathāvaṃsa* iv; 50

Popular Indian myths pertaining to nagas, garudas and Mount Meru shared even by Buddhists have been used to beautify his narration of the story by the poet with intermittent supernatural elements. Similes, metaphors, hyperbolical expressions and other literary devices borrowed from classical Sanskrit poetry and employed with restraint to bring out the desired effect make the melody and the rhythm of individual poems more attractive and admirable. As a whole both canonical and non-canonical Pali literature depict the Buddhist attitude to different aspects of aesthetic appreciation of all art forms.

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79 *Apūrvavastunirmānaksamā prjñā pratibhā*

Symbology in Similes

"O monks, I shall preach you the dhamma similar to a raft, being for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping."

"Kullūpamaṃ vo bhikkhave dhammaṃ desissāmi nittharanatthāya no gahanatthāya."

—*M.* i, p.134

5. Buddhist Art Symbols for Religious Edification

The introduction of religious symbolism in Buddhist art is a remarkable event in Buddhist cultural history. The significance of the symbolism lies in the fact that it gave depth and precision to a number of Buddhist ideals promoting the aesthetic sensitivity of the common folk for the propagation and edification of the religion.

Buddhist art is specifically Buddhist in content. The artist turned artisan employed art tinged with folk elements to express his fervour as an exponent of Buddhism. In their attempt to disseminate the message of the Buddha to the people by way of art, artists have continued to preserve the Buddhist identity up to the present day. Therefore the religious symbols evolved by Buddhist artists reveal their sense of beauty in relation to religious edification of abstract doctrinal and religious themes with a superb communicating skill hitherto unknown in Brahmanic and other religious circles. Apart from symbols used for religious edification, the oldest Buddhist carvings in medallions and panels not only in Bharhut and Sanchi but also in Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda, though didactic and moralising in purpose, are innovative as a medium of mass communication; for they portray the message of the Buddha in a way appealing to the common sense of the ordinary man. Herein some of the popular Buddhist religious symbols used extensively all over the world are examined briefly.

Beginning from the earliest available archaeological

remains in Bharhut and Sanchi of the Mauryan period in the 3rd century B.C., under the patronage of Emperor Asoka in India, Buddhist religious symbolism developed throughout several centuries. The subsequent phases of Greco-Roman art of Gandhara and Indo-Kushan art of Mathura developed under Kushanas after Kanishka in the 1st century A.D., seem to have continued up to the 5th century A.D. Both phases are considered landmarks in the history of Buddhist art in general and Buddhist religious symbolism in particular. The art and architecture of Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda in the Andhra country beginning from the 1st century B.C. and flourishing up to the 4th century A.D., played a significant role in popularising Buddhist values in South India. Yet another phase of Indian Buddhist art is found in the cave art and architecture in Western India. Out of these caves, Ajanta and Ellora are unique in the history of Buddhist art in India. Beginning from the 1st century B.C. Ajanta was developed until the 7th century A.D. But Ellora on the other hand, being under Hindu, Jain and Buddhist influence from time to time, is said to have begun in the 3rd century A.D. flourishing up to the 7th century A.D.[1]

The Wheel of Law *(dhammacakka)*

Among the symbols used for religious edification, the Wheel of Law *(dhammacakka)* can be considered as one of the earliest. It represents what the Buddha has said in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* with reference to His first sermon in Benares. In the discourse the Buddha disclosed that He was proceeding to the city of Benares in Kasi in order to set the

[1] Guruge Ananda W.P. *Buddhism, The Religion and its Culture,* pp.78 ff. (Sec. Ed. 1984)

Wheel of Law in motion.[2] Therefore that very first discourse addressed to the five ascetics is called the "Turning of the Wheel of Law" *(Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta).* In the discourse itself it is stated explicitly that "the Buddha has set arolling at the Deer Park in Isipatana, Benares, the unsurpassed Wheel of Law which cannot be made to roll back by any recluse or brahmin or deity or *Mara* or *Brahma*".[3]

Therefore it is quite clear that the wheel symbol in Buddhist art has not been created in imitation of solar or lunar symbols of Vedic mythology nor the wheel jewel *(cakka-ratana)* of the mythical universal monarch who is said to have in possession seven jewels in all. T.B. Karunaratne who has reviewed the concept of wheel symbol in iconography provides us with an elaborate description of the symbol in different contexts.[4] Buddhaghosa in the 5th century A.D. distinguishes no less than eight wheels:

1. Wheel of happiness *(sampatti cakka)*
2. Wheel as a mark on the soles of the Buddha's feet *(lakkhaṇa cakka)*
3. Chariot wheel *(rathanga cakka)*
4. Wheel of changing postures *(iriyāpatha cakka)*
5. Wheel in the sense of practising liberality *(dāna cakka)*
6. Wheel jewel of a universal monarch *(ratana cakka)*
7. Wheel of Law *(dhamma cakka)*

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2 *Dhammacakkaṃ pavattetuṃ–gacchāmi kāsinaṃ puraṃ–M.* i, p.160 ff.

3 *"Etaṃ bhagavatā bārānasiyaṃ ispatane migadāye anuttaraṃ dhammacakkaṃ pavattitaṃ appativattiyaṃ samanena vā brāhmanena vā devena vā mārena vā brahmunā vā kenaci vā lokasmin'ti"–Vin.* 1, p.10 ff. Also *S.* v, pp.420 ff.

4 Karunaratne T.B.–*The Buddhist Wheel Symbol*–The Wheel Publication 137/138 BPS Sri Lanka

8. Wheel of torture *(urasi cakka)*[5]

Out of all of these wheels, the Wheel of Law is distinctly Buddhist. The first public communication of the doctrine is signified metaphorically by the phrase "Turning of the Wheel of Law". Since the wheel symbolises the doctrine that the Buddha realised and preached for the weal and welfare of the entire world, the Mauryan artist seems to have considered that the best symbol to represent the dhamma is the wheel which had already been alluded to in the first discourse.

It is not a mere chariot wheel nor the replica of any other wheel. It is the Wheel of doctrine which keeps rolling on and on. The number of spokes may vary according to the inclination of the artist.[6] The wheel depicted on the Asoka pillar in Saranath has twenty-four spokes, which may represent the twenty-four conditions *(paccaya).* A wheel with twelve spokes may represent either the three circles of the Four Noble Truths thus making them twelvefold *(tiparivaṭṭam dvādasākaraṃ)* or the twelve links of the Dependent Origination. However what is significant is, the rolling wheel characterises the dynamic and novel character of the dhamma in contrast to static and customary dogmas of the time.

Out of many and diverse representations of the Wheel of Law, one carved on the seat below the famous Saranath Buddha statue depicting the Buddha with the hand gesture of the Wheel of Law *(dhammacakka mudrā)* is note-

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5 *"Sampattiyaṃ lakkhanaṃ ca*
rathange iriyāpathe
dāne ratanadhammūre
cakkādisu ca dissati "–MA. ii, p.27.

6 Vide. *The Buddhist Wheel Symbol,* Plate II

worthy in this connection. It gives the original idea of rolling forward as propounded in the *Ariyapariyesana-sutta.* The artist of the Indo-Kushana period as it seems, being inspired by the textual reference, went beyond the imaginative power of his predecessors at Bharhut, Sanchi and Amaravati who exhibited this side or that side of the wheel, and represented the wheel symbol more realistically so as to convey the idea of moving forward. The depiction is differentiated from a chariot wheel by puffing up both sides of the wheel artistically.

Subsequently, the original idea of the wheel in motion seems to have been lost and in order to distinguish the Wheel of Law from the chariot wheel some of the artists have gone to the extent of depicting it with its horizontal and vertical spokes jutting out of the rim of the wheel without realising that this would make it look like a steering wheel or rudder of a ship. Thus the Wheel of Law has undergone changes in the course of history in regard to the number of spokes and their positions. In the same way the cross in Christianity also has been subjected to similar changes due to some reason or other. The common Latin cross is remarkably different from the crosses of St. Anthony, St. Andrew, St. George and St. John. Then again Papal, Celtic and Coptic crosses are different from the cross of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Buddha is said to have possessed wheel symbols on His soles. It is stated in the *Anguttara Nikāya* that the Brahmin Dona beheld on the footprint of the Buddha "the wheel marks with their thousand spokes, with their rims and hubs and all their attributes complete".[7] It is interest-

[7] *"Sahassarāni sanemikāni sanābhkāni sabbākāraparipūrāni"* –*A.* ii, p.37

ing to note that while describing the wheel jewel of an universal monarch the same phraseology has been used in the discourses of *Mahāsudassana* and *Cakkavattisihanāda* in the *Dīgha Nikāya.* It is quite clear that the concept of the *dhammacakka* has nothing to do either with the wheel marks on the soles of the Teacher or with the universal monarch's wheel jewel which appears on its own and conquers in all the directions being followed by the fourfold army and finally comes back and stands at the door of the monarch's inner apartment. The wheel mark is one of the thirty-two marks of a Great Man by which the Buddhas and universal monarchs form a class by themselves. It is noteworthy that these marks have been introduced with the concept of quasi-divinity attributed to the Buddha a few centuries after His demise.[8]

Peculiar enough, the list of thirty-two marks begins with the marks on the soles suggesting the fact that they were the marks perpetrated at first when the concept of the marks of a great man was introduced.

In Sanchi the Wheel of Law is represented as resting on three conventionalised projections named *satti* or *nandipāda* which according to some has been modelled in imitation of the trident in Hinduism. Karunaratna has drawn a diagram showing the evolution of this motif in Buddhist art.[9] The symbol, however, has been interpreted to mean the Triple Gem: the Buddha, *dhamma and sangha.* If the middle projection represents the *dhamma* it is not relevant to depict the *dhamma* again by the wheel symbol placed on *nandi.* In the same way if the wheel symbolises the Buddha, the interpretation of the first projection as the

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8 Vide. Below on the Buddhist Statue

9 *The Buddhist Wheel Symbol.* Plate III

Buddha is superfluous. Therefore with all probability *satti* or *nandipāda* might have been carved to signify the three baskets *(tipitaka)* which was completed by the time of Asoka. The view that the word of the Buddha was represented by the three baskets had gained ground by that period. Then the symbols taken together as a whole may mean the three baskets representing the Teaching of the Buddha.

The Pillar of Fire or the Torch

The Buddha is the embodiment of Wisdom and Compassion. Since the Enlightenment is expressed metaphorically by the clause 'light arose' *(āloko udapādi)* in the first discourse preached by the Buddha, the light of wisdom that He has gained under the Bodhi tree is to be considered as the light that dispels the darkness of ignorance. It is to be noted that in Indian literature as a whole, ignorance is often symbolised as darkness. As we know, the problem of darkness *(tamas)* and light *(jyoti)* have been particularly mooted in Upanisadic circles.[10] The wish to be led unto light from darkness was one of the major concerns at the time. Therefore the light of the flambeau or the torch or the pillar of fire represents the Enlightened One who dispels the darkness of ignorance with His light of wisdom.[11]

For that matter, the Buddha has been referred to as the Torch-Bearer *(ukkādhāra)* who dissipates the darkness of ignorance with the light of wisdom.[12] Therefore the early

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10 *"Tamaso mā jyotir gamaya!" –Brhadaranyaka Upanishad,* I. 3. 28

11 *"Karunāsītala hadayaṃ*
Paññāpajjotavihatamohatamaṃ
Sanarāmaraloka garuṃ
vande sugataṃ gativimuttaṃ" –DA, p.1

12 *"Ukkādhāro manussānaṃ– niccaṃ apacito mayā" –Sn.* p.337

Buddhist artists at Amaravati and elsewhere conceived the Buddha as a torch, a flambeau which archaeologists refer to as a Pillar of Fire. Since the Buddha illuminates the world of darkness with His light of wisdom, the symbol is aesthetically innovative and suggestive.

The Bodhi Tree

The Bodhi Tree provided shade and shelter to the Buddha from the scorching summer sun. The tree seems to have had a religious significance even in the Indus Valley civilisation and later in the Vedic period. As the tree, popularly known as a pipal, grew luxuriantly and majestically with thick foliage sheltering a wide area, early Aryans seemed to have thought, as revealed by the seals excavated from Indus valley, that the tree was the abode of a deity or deities. But the Buddha's association with the tree gave it a different turn. In the scene depicting the naga king Erakapatta's visit to the Buddha, a Bodhi tree has been carved to represent the Buddha. Particularly, at Sanchi the Enlightenment is symbolised by the Bodhi tree. Because of the symbolical significance attached to the tree under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment, artists continued to use Bodhi leaves as a decorative motif in Buddhist topes and shrines. Since the Enlightenment occurred under this particular tree it was thence known as the Bodhi Tree, the Ficus Religiosa.

The concept of symbolical representation of the Buddha Gotama by the Bodhi tree has even been extended at Bharhut to represent previous Buddhas as well. In Bharhut carvings we come across the representations of the Buddhas such as Vipassi by a patali tree (Bigonia Suaveotens), Vessabhu by a sala tree (Shorea Robusta), Kakusandha by

a sirisa tree (Acacia Sirisa), Kanakamuni (or Konagamana) by an udumbara tree (Ficus Glomerata) and Kassapa by a *nigrodha* tree (Ficus Indica). The sculptors were careful enough to carve the distinguishing features of these trees in order that people could identify the Buddhas represented by them. These carvings however show the extent of the buddhological development among Indian Buddhists by the 2nd century B.C.[13]

The Footprint and the Vacant Seat

In a panel at Bharhut the descent of the Buddha from the heaven of the thirty-three gods to Sankassa after preaching the *Abbidhamma is* depicted with footprints on a triple ladder where wheel symbols are displayed in the middle of the footprints symbolising the Buddha's descent. The Buddha and universal monarchs are differentiated by the wheel symbol on their soles. The symbol in the footprints of the Buddha prompted Dona to ask the Buddha who he was. In the early stage when images had not been carved yet to represent the Buddha, the footprint with this special symbol had been chosen for carvings.[14]

At Amaravati footprints are depicted with *swastika* and *nandi,* but in Anuradhapura we come across footprints with some more symbols. The concept of the signs on the soles of the Buddha gradually developed on an alarming scale and the Buddha was supposed to have no less than one hundred and eight auspicious signs on His soles. The symbol of the footprint as a sacred object of worship attracted devotees. Therefore sculptors and painters began to represent many

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13 Vide. *The Way of the Buddha*–Government of India, New Delhi 1995

14 *A.* ii, p.37.

more marks with skill and dexterity, sometimes extending up to the one hundred and eight signs the Buddha was supposed to have had on His soles. In this regard the carvings of footprints found in Thailand and Cambodia are the most complete ones. In almost all the countries in Asia where Buddhism spread, the Buddha's footprint was considered a sacred object of worship. The devotional feelings towards the footprint must have been strengthened by the conviction that the Buddha had left the impression of His sole on the summit of mountains in several countries including Sri Lanka.

The Stupa

The first reference to the stupa in Buddhist tradition is found in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* where the Buddha is said to have told Ananda that the remains of the Buddha, a Paccekabuddha, a disciple of the Buddha and an universal monarch were worthy of honour by erecting cairns at four crossroads for the benefit and happiness of the people for a long time.[15] The discourse continues to state that after the cremation of the Teacher's body the remains were divided into eight portions and given to those kings who had rushed to the cremation ground demanding a portion of the remains. Those kings who received the remains or the relics, built cairns (Pali: *thūpa;* Sanskrit: *stūpa)* in their kingdoms and continued to pay honour and respect to the relics of the Teacher enshrined in them.[16]

What is noticeable in this regard is that the stupa is a Buddhist version of the burial mound going far back into

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15 *D.* ii, p.142

16 *D.* ii, p.165. Also see Gnanarama, Ven. P. *The Mission Accomplished.* p.12, Singapore 1997

the history of the Aryan civilisation. Originally although the monuments of this nature were built at the very spots where the dead were buried, with the distribution of the relics of the Teacher to the claimants from the eight territories we enter into a new phase of the evolution of the concept of burial mounds. Now these mounds are no longer the places where the souls of the dead rest as believed by the people of pre-Buddhist cultures all over the world, they are religious monuments that inspire devotion and faith.

With all probability it was Asoka who popularised stupa worship in Buddhism. As revealed by the Bharhut and Sanchi topes he introduced a particular symbology of his own in building stupas and thus gave a definite Buddhist interpretation to the old concept of burial mounds. When Buddhism spread far and wide the stupa was considered an essential constituent of a Buddhist monastery together with the shrine hall and the Bodhi tree. This seems to be a trend followed by the identification of 'stupa' with *'cetiya'* (Sanskrit: *caitya)* a pre-Buddhist shrine or a monument with a religious significance. There are three kinds of cetiyas.

1. *Sāririka cetiya*–A stupa in which the relics of the Buddha have been enshrined.
2. *Pāribhogika cetiya*–A stupa in which what the Buddha utilized has been enshrined.
3. *Uddesika cetiya*–An image made to represent the Buddha.

With the lapse of time the symbology introduced in Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati and elsewhere in the early period, was subjected to evolution in different Asian countries affecting the structure and the components of cetiya construction.[17]

[17] Yet another type called '*dhamma cetiya*' has been introduced,

In the course of time six types of topes have been named according to their structural peculiarity:

1. *Ghanṭhākāra*–bell-shaped
2. *Ghaṭākāra*–waterpot-shaped
3. *Bubbulākāra*–bubble-shaped
4. *Dhānyākāra*–heap-of-paddy-shaped
5. *Padmākāra*–lotus-shaped
6. *Āmalakākāra*–myrobalan-shaped

In addition to these six types which Parker has quoted, another type called *Palandavākāra* is mentioned but has not been recognised distinctly as well as the two types: heap-of-paddy-shaped and myrobalan-shaped described by Parker and others.[18]

Different interpretations have been given to the symbology of the stupa. Ramachandran interpreted the stupa as a symbolical representation of the mythical mountain Mahameru which is supposed to be at the centre of the universe. According to him umbrellas *(chatta)* suggest the divisions of the universe.[19] K. C. Aryan interpreted it as an imitation of an old Vedic symbol of a bow and arrow i.e. an arrow fixed on a bow.[20] Sujata Soni writing on stupa structure in Myanmar gives a different interpretation by

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perhaps by Mahayanists. Important discourses engraved on gold or copper plates were enshrined in this kind of top

18 Parker H.–*Ancient Ceylon,* p.336. *Palandarākāra* perhaps means onion shaped, from *palaṇḍuka* measuring onion–*Vin.* iv, p.259

19 *2500 Years of Buddhism,* p.282–Government of India, New Delhi

20 Aryan K.C.–*Basis of Decorative Elements of Indian Art,* pp.17–18, New Delhi 1981

tracing the creation of stupa to the imitation of the inverted alms-bowl, drinking cup and walking stick or umbrella of the Buddha placed over the three robes duly folded. She says: "This can be easily understood visualising the situation with the robes of the Buddha duly folded and spread on a prepared ground with the almsbowl inverted on these in the centre and over the arms-bowl to be successively put, the drinking cup and the walking staff or umbrella."[21] According to Lama Anagarika Govinda it is a synthesis of the psycho-cosmic image of man. For he says: "…in which the physical elements and laws of nature and their counterparts, the different world planes and their corresponding stages of consciousness, as well as that which transcends them, have their place. That such ideas go back to the earlier period of Indian history can be seen from representations of the ancient Jain world system in the shape of a human figure."[22] Continuing his argument, he says that Nepalese topes have preserved archaic features in many respects. The decoration of the *hammikā* or *harmikā* with painted human eyes according to him suggests a human figure in the posture of meditation hidden in the stupa, with his crossed legs in the base, his body up to the shoulders in the hemisphere and his head in the *harmikā* corresponding to the psycho-physiological doctrine of the centres of psychic force located one above the other in the human body.[23]

The Tibetan Tanjur however identifies the structural parts of a stupa with the doctrinal subjects taught in Buddhism. For instance, the four steps of the four-sided

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21 Soni, Sujata–*Evolution of Stupas in Burma,* p.26, Delhi 1991

22 Lama Anagarika Govinda–*Psycho-Cosmic Symbolism of the Buddhist Stupa,* p.84, USA 1976

23 Ibid–p.85

basal structure of a stupa according to Tanjur represents the four foundations of mindfulness i.e., *kāyānupassanā, vedanānupassanā, cittānupassanā* and *dhammānu passanā.* Then the four kinds of right efforts, the seven factors of enlightenment and so on. As this method of identification undoubtedly serves a religious purpose, it is being followed even by some modern writers.[24]

Among these mythological, fanciful, mystic and religious interpretations, one given by the famous Sri Lankan archaeologist, Paranavitana, is considered by scholars to be more authentic. He says:

"The essential part of the structure of an ancient stupa was a solid hemispherical dome which, to begin with, must have been a heap of earth, and was therefore of the same character as the round barrows of Europe. This similarity indicates that the stupa originated from the funerary monuments of the ancient Aryan people. A terrace or beam is added to the hemispherical dome at its base. In stupas of larger size, there were three-stepped terraces."[25]

Referring to the dome he says that the relic chamber in the shape of a stone box or cist is in the centre of the dome and there are three relic chambers in larger topes: below ground level, ground level and above, symbolising the subterranean world of serpents, earth and heavenly worlds respectively thereby representing the cosmos by way of stupa symbology. An octagonal pillar, originally of wood and later of stone, was embedded in the solid masonry of the hemispherical dome, and on it a disc of stone in the shape of an umbrella had been fixed to indicate sovereignty and respect.

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[24] Ibid – p.55

[25] Paranavitana S. – *Sinhalayo* p.20, Colombo 1967

In large stupas such as at Sanchi, there were three umbrellas one over the other, the upper of smaller diameter than the lower. In the course of time the original concept seems to have been forgotten, the series of umbrellas, which gradually increased in number, took the form of a moulded brick spire. The shaft of the umbrella was represented cylindrically. The square railing *(caturassa)* also assumed the form of solid brick masonry, the sides of which were ornamented with railing patterns.[26]

Since the inception of the stupa as a Buddhist religious symbol it was regarded as a sacred object of devotion. Not only the stupa was given an artistic finish with decorations of lotus petals, floral and creeper designs, as we find in the the earliest examples from Bharhut and Sanchi, its surroundings were also made scenic by adding on ornamental gateways and other intricate carvings with a superb sense of beauty.

Buddha Statue

Whether there were Buddha statues in the lifetime of the Buddha or in the succeeding four centuries after His demise is conjectural. Perhaps as the later work *Kosalabimbavannanā* records, there might have been an image or images carved to represent Him when He was not physically present in the monastery where He was dwelling. Nevertheless, after His demise until the period of Kanishka, artists seem to have abstained from representing Him in human form due to a doctrinal problem involved, because, after the demise, the Buddha is beyond birth and death which is a state beyond measure and verbal predication. So any attempt to attribute anthropomorphism to the Buddha

[26] op. cit. p.20

who is no more could end up in misrepresenting the very ideal the Buddha preached. Besides, He could have been regarded as one more god of the Hindu pantheon who has been born in a heaven particular to Himself.[27]

Presumably therefore, the Buddhist artists at Bharhut and Amaravati preferred to symbolise Him by a vacant seat or by a footprint or by the other means discussed above. A Gandhara sculptor inspired by Hellenic and Roman statuary seemed to have 'experimented' with carving the icons of the Buddha representing Him still as a Bodhisatta immediately before the Enlightenment, practising extreme forms of self-mortification.

The famous Bodhisatta statue from Gandhara, now found in the Lahore Museum is a verbatim version of the description of austere asceticism recorded in the *Mahāsīhanāda-sutta.* In the discourse the Buddha addressing Venerable Sariputta says:

"Sariputta; I recall having lived a holy life possessing four factors: I have practised asceticism – the extreme of asceticism; I have practised coarseness – the extreme of coarseness; I have practised scrupulousness – the extreme of scrupulousness; I have practised seclusion – the extreme of seclusion."

Then comes a long description of extreme forms of asceticism, coarseness, scrupulousness and seclusion followed by their aftermath. "Now I recall having eaten single kola-fruit a day" "…through feeding on a single kola-fruit a day, my body reached a state of extreme emaciation. Because of eating so little my limbs became like the jointed segments of vine stems or bamboo stems. Because of

27 Gnanarama, Ven. P. – *An Approach to Buddhist Social Philosophy,* p.17

eating so little my backside became like a camel's hoof. Because of eating so little the projections on my spine stood out like corded beads. Because of eating so little my ribs jutted out as gaunt as the crazy rafters of an old roofless barn. Because of eating so little the gleam of my eyes sank far down in their sockets, looking like a gleam of water that had sunk far down in a deep well. Because of eating so little my scalp shrivelled and withered as a green bitter-gourd shrivels and withers in the wind and sun. Because of eating so little my belly skin adhered to my backbone, and if I touched my belly skin I encountered my backbone, and if I touched my backbone I encountered my belly skin. Because of eating so little if I tried to ease my body by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hair rotted at its roots, fell from my body as I rubbed."[28]

By adjusting the garment artistically to display the *Bodhisatta's* torso, the unknown sculptor was very pertinent to delineate the condition of the extremely emaciated body of the *Bodhisatta* as revealed in the discourse. Undoubtedly, the Buddhists at that time must have admired the masterpiece in question with appreciation and encouragement.

By this time, the thirty-two signs of a Great Man said to have been in vogue in Brahmanic circles had been ascribed to the person of the Buddha, which made it impossible to carve an icon of the Buddha without misrepresenting Him as a historical personage. Therefore it is plausible to examine how the concept originated and how the sculptors over-

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28 *The Middle Length Sayings of the Buddha,* p.175. Translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, BPS, Sri Lanka 1995

came the difficulty they were confronted with, together with the Buddhist interpretation of a Great Man as depicted in the earlier references in the Pali canonical works.

The Concept of a Great Man

The Pali scriptures have recorded two different aspects of the concept of a Great Man. One is mythical, Brahmanical and popular while the other is genuinely Buddhist, original and authentic.

Among Brahmins and Buddhists two trains of thought seem to have prevailed in identifying a Great Man, nevertheless when Buddhism began to evolve with popular characteristics the Brahmanic concept appears to have superseded even in Buddhist circles overshadowing the original Buddhist concept of a Great Man. The fact is clearly vindicated by the discourses where the Brahmins being well-versed in the traditional Brahmanic wisdom were represented as interested in finding out whether the Buddha actually had all the thirty-two physical marks on His body to recognise Him as a Great Man.

The *Ambattha, Mahāpādāna* and *Lakkhana-suttas* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* and the *Brahmāyu* and the *Sela-suttas* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* specifically speak of these natal marks of a Great Man while affirming that the Buddha possessed them, too. As stated in the *Brahmāyu* the Brahmins who were desirous of finding out whether the Buddha was really a Great Man with these marks on His body, ultimately came to the decision by careful observation that the Buddha was really a Great Man having not only these thirty-two marks but also having some more marks particular to the Buddha Himself.

As given in the discourses the knowledge of physiognomy

was considered a branch of traditional Brahmanic learning together with the knowledge of three Vedas, vocabulary, prosody, rhetoric, etymology, history, metre and grammar.[29] The origin of the concept of bodily marks denoting a Great Man is shrouded in mystery. The indologists who tried to identify the origin of the concept are not unanimous in their decisions. For instance Burnoff attributed the origin of these natal marks to Cosmic Man *(virātpurusa)* found in the *Purusa Sūkta* of the Rig Veda. But Senart and Waddell preferred to interpret them in terms of epithets used to glorify *Vishnu.*[30] Rhys Davids, while saying that the concept originated among Brahmins and that it can be traced back to the myth of Osiris, asserts that the Indian version of it is found in the *Purusa Sūkta* of the Rig Veda.[31] In another instance he has stated: "They are in part adaptation to a man of poetical epithets applied to the sun or to the personification of the mystic human sacrifice; partly characteristic of personal beauty such as any man might have, one or two of them: the little wart, for instance, between the eyes with white hair on it, and the protuberance at the top of the head may possibly have been added in reminiscence of personal bodily peculiarities which Gotama actually had."[32]

As he was not convinced so much with regard to the attribution of these natal marks to any human in another instance he asserts: "Most of the marks are so absurd, con-

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29 *"Tiṇṇam vedānaṃ pāragū sanighaṇḍukeṭubhānaṃ sākkharappabhedānaṃ itihāsapancamānaṃ padako veyyakaraṇo lokāyatamahāpurisalakkhaṇesu anavayo"* p.133

30 Vide. *Concept of Great Man*–Wimalaratana, Ven. Dr. Bellanwila. The concept has been discussed in detail by the author.

31 *Dialogues of the Buddha,* iii, p.31

32 *Dialogues of the Buddha,* i, p.131, fn. 4

sidered as marks of any human, that they are probably mythological in origin and three or four seem to be solar."[33]

In the *Lakkhana sutta* as well as in the *Vatthugāthā* of the *Suttanipāta* the career of the Great Man who possesses these marks are stated. In the *Vatthugāthā,* the Brahmin Bavari asserts explicitly that the thirty-two marks of greatness have been listed in the ancient teachings and that a person born with these marks on his body has two options open to him and no more: if he remains in lay life, he will be a universal monarch; if he leaves the household life behind, he will become a Buddha, a Fully Enlightened One.[34]

The *Lakkhana-sutta,* differing from the other discourses where the thirty-two marks of the Buddha's body are given by the inquisitive Brahmins by observation, gives the list of marks by way of a discourse of the Buddha addressed to the monks. However with slight variations in details, both traditions; Theravada and Mahayana, have recorded the thirty-two marks with reference to the Buddha's body. In addition to the Chinese canon, Mahayana texts such as *Lalitavistara, Mahāvyutpatti, Gandavyūha, Arthavinischaya Sūtra, Divyāvadāna, Mahāvastu, Abhisamayālankārāloka,* give the full list of thirty-two marks.

According to the *Lakkhana* and the *Brahmāyu-suttas* the the Pali version of the thirty-two marks is as follows:

1. He has feet with a level tread *(suppatiṭṭhitapāda)*
2. On the soles of his feet wheels appear with a thousand spokes with rims and hubs in every way complete *(heṭṭhā pādatalesu cakkāni jātāni)*
3. He has projecting heels *(āyatapanhi)*

[33] *Dialogues of the Buddha,* iii, p.136

[34] *Sn,* pp.976 ff.

4. He has long fingers *(dīghanguli)*
5. He has soft and tender hands and feet *(mudutalunahatthapāda)*
6. His fingers and toes are webbed *(jālahatthapāda)*
7. His ankles are over the exact middle of the tread *(ussankapāda)*
8. His legs are like those of an antelope *(enijanghā)*
9. While standing without stooping, he can touch and rub his knees with both hands at once *(ṭhitakov'a anonamanto ubhohi hatthehi jannukāni parāmasati)*
10. His privities are within a sheath *(kosohitavatthaguyha)*
11. He has a golden complexion *(suvannavaṇṇa)*
12. No dust or dirt can lodge on his skin *(sukhumacchavi)*
13. On his body there is only one hair in each pore *(ekekaloma)*
14. Each hair is curling to the right at its tip *(uddhaggalomā)*
15. He has a straight body *(brahmujjugatta)*
16. His body has seven convex surfaces *(sattussada)*
17. The upper part of his body is like that of a lion *(sihapubbaddhakāyo)*
18. He has no furrows between his shoulder blades *(sitantaransa)*
19. He has the symmetry of a banyan tree *(nigrodhaparimandala)*
20. He has a round torso *(samavattakkhandha)*
21. He has an acutely sensitive sense of taste *(rasaggasaggī)*
22. His jaws are like those of a lion *(sihahanu)*

23. He has forty teeth *(cattālisa dantā)*
24. He has even teeth *(samadantā)*
25. There are no spaces between his teeth *(avivara dantā)*
26. His teeth are very white *(susukkadāṭhā)*
27. His tongue is large *(pahūtajivhā)*
28. His voice is like that of Brahma *(brahmassara)*
29. His eyes are extremely blue *(abbinilanetta)*
30. His eyelashes are like those of a cow *(gopakhuma)*
31. Between his eyebrows there is white hair as soft as cotton *(uṇṇā)*
32. His head is shaped like a turban *(uṇhīsasīsa)*

The interpretation of some of these marks differs in the two traditions which has been shown by Ven. Wimalaratana.[35] In the *Lakkhana-sutta* we are informed of the specific *kammas* that resulted in this special physical marks which is more or less like an attempt to rationalise the marks on the Buddhist teaching of kamma and make it a distinct Buddhist concept. Buddhaghosa in the commentary attempts very earnestly to explain the special feature of these marks which shows that Pali tradition as well as the Sanskrit tradition have borrowed the concept from a common source, probably Brahmanic, and later interpreted them independently. The *Buddhavansa* speaks of another eighty minor marks *(asīti anuvyañjana)* of the Buddha's body keeping in line with the parallel development of the concept in Mahayana.[36] Mahavira is said to have possessed one thousand and eight bodily marks.[37]

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[35] Chapter iv, *Concept of Great Man,* pp.72 ff.

[36] *Buddhavansa,* p.55

[37] Vide Appendix iii, *Concept of Great Man,* pp.196 ff.

A Great Man in Early Buddhist Perspective

The Buddha was certainly a great personality in the full sense of the term. He diverted the course of history making a remarkable impact on human civilisation. Even two thousand five hundred years after His demise, He is still 'living' among the seekers all over the globe, being respected with grateful devotion. He was great not because of the physical marks supposed to have been possessed by Him, but because of the unique spiritual qualities He possessed. Presumably He must have had an attractive, awe-inspiring physique inherited from His royal birth which should have become more pleasant to behold due to His inner qualities such as Great Wisdom and Great Compassion expressed through word, deed and thought. In this regard the verses of Sela can be cited. These seem to be earlier and belong to a different stratum revealing the Buddha's admirable pleasant appearance as a whole:

1. "O Buddha, you have a perfect body, you are resplendent, well-born, handsome, of golden colour; you have white teeth and you are energetic."
2. "If there be any signs of a man who is well-born, all those signs of a great man are on your body."
3. "You have bright eyes, a handsome countenance; you are great, straight, majestic; you shine like the sun in the midst of the assembly of monks."
4. "You are a monk of lovely appearance; you have a skin like gold; what advantage can there be in being an ascetic when you are possessed of such a splendid complexion?"[38]

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[38] *Sn*, pp. 548–551

What seems to be the early Buddhist concept of a Great Man is also found in several places of the Pali canon where the spiritual and intellectual qualities of a Great Man have been highlighted over the physical marks.

In elucidation of a question about a Great Man submitted by Thera Sariputta the Buddha said: "It is by emancipation of mind that I call a man great. Without emancipation of mind there is no Great Man." Then the Buddha describes the process of purifying the mind leading to the elimination of intoxicants *(asavas)* and declares that without this there is no Great Man.[39] There seems to have been doubts with regard to the factors that contribute to one becoming a Great Man. Two Brahmins, Tissa Metteyya and Vassakara, also have put the question to the Buddha for an explanation. These two instances clearly show that it is not the bodily marks that make a Great Man but the spiritual attainments together with the motivation to serve the world that make a man great.

Tissa Metteyya puts the question directly: "Who would you say deserved the title 'Great Man'?" The Buddha's reply reveals that a Great Man is a person who has destroyed all passions. He is none other than a Perfected One, an Arahant. As given in the discourse the Buddha says: "There is a person who is not full of agitation. It is the monk whose actions, in a sensuous world, are pure and good. He does not have the thirst of craving, he never loses mindfulness, and he has, by his own decision, become extinguished, calm."[40]

Vassakara puts his own version of a Great Man which the Buddha contrasted. According to Vassakara a Great Man has four qualities:

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39 *S.* v, p.158

40 *Sn,* pp. 1040–1041

1. He is learned and understands the meaning as soon as he hears.
2. He has a good memory.
3. He is skilful and diligent in every affair.
4. He is resourceful and capable of organising these affairs.

The Buddha's definition reveals that a Great Man is none other than a Perfected One:

1. He who works for the benefit of the many folk and establishes the many-folk on the Noble Path.
2. He entertains whatever thought or concept he wishes to apply and does not apply whatever thought or concept he does not want to apply.
3. He attains without any difficulty the four meditative absorptions.
4. He destroys the *āsavas* in this very life and abides in release through wisdom *(paññavimutti)* and release of mind *(cetovimutti)*.[41]

A Great Man may have many spiritual and intellectual attributes over and above mere physical marks. He is perfected in every way. A verse in the Dhammapada summarises these qualities: "He who has overcome craving *(vītatanho)*, devoid of grasping *(anādāno)*, who is skilled in etymology and terms *(niruttipadakovido)*, who knows the grouping of letters *(akkharānaṃ sannipātaṃ)* and their sequence *(pubbāparāni ca)*, it is he who is called the bearer of the final body, one of profound wisdom *(mahāpañño)*, a Great Man *(mahāpurisa)*."[42]

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41 *A.* ii, p.35

42 *Dhp,* 352

As the foregoing scriptural references illustrate the early Buddhist concept of a Great Man is distinctly different from what the brahmins thought a Great Man should be. Certainly, the identification of a Great Man lies not on those congenital marks but on the realisation and the practise of the Buddhist Ideal.

Conventions of Hand Gestures and Postures

It seems that the introduction of hand gestures *(mudrā)* and postures *(āsana)* made it possible to produce the images of the Buddha still living and not after His demise, because any attempt to represent Him after His demise could have become a distortion of the highest Buddhist ideal. Hence it is more reasonable to think, on account of the introduction of the technique of using hand gestures and postures to represent the Buddha either through carving or through painting, the artist of the Gandhara school could overcome the difficulty encountered by his predecessors. What is significant in this connection is that these gestures and postures are purely Indian in origin. Beginning from a very popular and limited number, in the course of time, many more gestures and postures were introduced by different artists of different periods in the countries where Buddhism spread. Among the Buddha statues carved to represent the hand gestures, we have statues displaying: *i. Bhūmisparsha ii. Abhaya iii. Vitarka iv. Kaṭaka hasta v. Samādhi vi. Dhyāna vii. Dharmacakra* viii. *Sayana ix. Parinirvāna x. Bhadrāsana xi. Tyāga xii. Samudra xiii. Pātra xiv. Caṃkramana xv. Vairocana xvi. Āshisa xvii. Paradukkhadukkhita* and many more. Sometimes, the statues were carved to show two gestures by two hands. For instance, while one hand displays *abhaya mudra* the other depicts *vitarka mudra.*

In the same way many postures have been contemplated and they were given names for identification. Among them: *i. Padmāsana* or *Yogāsana ii. Vajrāsana iii. Lalitāsana iv. Virāsana v. Tadāsana vi. Sayanāsana vii. Bhadrāsana viii. Kāyotsarga ix. Samabhanga x. Ābhanga xi. Tribbanga* and some others are popular in many Buddhist countries. The sculptors of Gandhara followed by the Mathura school have shown their creative ability to impart depth and beauty of the human personality of the Buddha to masses of stone with their chisel and hammer, thus providing the prototype for later artists. It was the Greco-Roman artist of Gandhara who introduced the tuft of hair on the head, soft white hair between the eyebrows and the halo around the body together with curly hair and long ears in their icons which later became distinguishing characteristics of the Buddha statue up to now. Mathura artists however evolved a style of their own called 'wet robe' style followed by Sri Lankan artists, chiselling statues with an admirable sense of beauty, composure and equilibrium, symbolising the Buddha as the embodiment of compassion and wisdom. The standing Mathura Buddha image and the Buddha in Dharmacakra mudra in Benares are unique examples of the aesthetic sensibility of the Mathura artist. Statues in Samadhi posture found at Anuradhapura and Toluvila reveal that Sri Lankan artists of the same period were also highly proficient in representing serenity, wisdom and compassion of the Buddha by means of the statues they chiselled.

It has been suggested that images covering both shoulders found in Gandhara have been dressed in imitation of the toga, an upper dress worn by Roman patricians. This could not possibly be so; because, it was customary among

the ascetics and the well-to-do to cover both shoulders with a shawl or by wearing an upper garment. It is very unlikely that the Gandhara artist was ignorant of the particular dress called ‘robe’ *(civara)* used by the Buddha and the disciples. What is discernible here is, he has given an artistic twist to the robe worn by the Buddha to make the statue an aesthetically appreciative piece of art.

Ven. T. Ratanasara has collected quite a good number of photos of Buddha statues depicting hand gestures and postures in his work *Budupilima* (sinhala), published by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Sri Lanka (1985).

The Lotus Motif in Buddhist Art

There is many a reference in the early Pali canonical texts to lotuses of blue, red and white colours. Often we come across these in similes illustrating some points of doctrinal discussions and events of importance. Ponds of lotuses *(paduma)* in general, and ponds with full-bloom blue lotuses *(uppala or niluppala),* red lotuses *(paduma* or *rattuppala* or *kokanada)* and white lotuses *(puṇḍarika* or *setuppala* or *setapaduma)* are mentioned to clarify some of the issues connected with the events and discussion referred to.

As we find in the *Ariyapariyesana-sutta* as well as in the *Mahāvagga pāli,* when the Buddha surveyed the world just after the invitation of the Brahma Sahampati to preach the doctrine He saw people of little dust in their eyes, much dust in their eyes, with acute faculties, with dull faculties, of good disposition, of bad disposition, docile, indocile and a few who abstain from evil, being afraid of the world beyond. To illustrate the fact three kinds of lotuses are drawn: Lotuses which are born and grow in the water, but thrive while immersed in the water, lotuses that reach the surface of

the water and the lotuses that stand rising out of the water without getting defiled by the water.[43] In the *Sangiti-sutta* where four kinds of recluses have been identified: Unshaken, Blue lotus; Exquisite, white lotus and the Once-Returner *(sakadāgamin)* identified with the Blue Lotus Recluse; and the Non-Returner with the White Lotus Recluse.[44]

As the lotus motif is widely used both in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist art, let us examine the rationale behind its symbolical use.

The lotus is attractive as a flower. Therefore in another instance blue, red and white lotuses are mentioned to illustrate the fact that they are attractive and loved by all. In mentioning a babe it is stated that he became the darling of all just as much as a lotus.[45] There is nothing mysterious in a lotus. As a motif in Buddhist art, it has a symbolical significance based on the original Buddhist scriptures. It grows in mud and filth, springs up above water and blossoms forth without getting sullied by the muddy water. Therefore the *Dhammapada* states:

> "As upon a heap of rubbish thrown in a pit of filth on the highway, a sweet-smelling lovely lotus may grow, even so amongst worthless beings, a disciple of the Fully Enlightened One outshines the blind worldlings in wisdom."[46]

The verse of Pingiyani praising the Buddha, which was given to Cullapanthaka by Mahapanthaka to memorise,

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43 *M.* i, p.169 and *Mahāvagga pali,* p.7

44 *D.* iii, p.233

45 *D.* ii, p.20

46 *Dhp,* 58, 59

compares the Buddha to a sweet-smelling red lotus that blossoms in the morning:

> "As a scented kokanada lotus,
> Opens in the morning with its perfume,
> See the One with Radiant Limbs, who glitters
> Like the sun's orb blazing in the heaven."[47]

Sabhiya characterises the Buddha who does not either cling to merit or evil, to a lotus that blossoms above the muddy water abode:

> "As a beautiful lotus flower does not cling to water, so you do not cling to both merit and evil. Stretch forth your feet Hero; Sabhiya pays homage to the Teacher's feet."[48]

The Simile of lotus has been quite comprehensively explained in the *Anguttara Nikāya.* Addressing the Brahmin Dona who was inquisitive, the Buddha said:

> "Just as Brahmin, a lotus, blue, red or white, though born in the water, grown up in the water, when it reaches the surface stands there unsoiled by the water; just so Brahmin, though born in the world, grown up in the world, having overcome the world, I abide unsoiled by the world. Take it that I am a Buddha, Brahmin."

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[47] *"Padumaṃ yathā kokanadaṃ sugandhaṃ*
Pātosiyāphullamavītagandhaṃ
Angirasaṃ passa virocamānaṃ
Tapantamādiccamivantalikkhe" –*A.* iii, p.239. *S.* i, p.81
Visuddhimagga xii 60

[48] *"Punḍarikaṃ yathā vaggu—toyena na upalippati*
Evaṃ puññe ca pāpe ca-ubhaye tvaṃ na lippasi
Pāde vīra pasārehi-sabhiyo vandati satthuno" –*Sn.* p.547

"As a lotus fair and lovely,
By the water is not soiled,
By the world am I not soiled:
Therefore Brahmin am I Buddha.[49]

Udayi among the early disciples, delineates the significance of the simile of lotus in the same vein. For he says:

> "As a lotus born in water grows, but is not defiled by the water, being sweet-smelling, delightful, in the same way too the Buddha, born in the world, dwells in the world; He is not defiled by the world as the lotus is not defiled by the water."[50]

As evidenced by textual references, lotus, irrespective of its colour, symbolises purity, perfection, beauty and fragrance. Therefore the Buddha as well as the Arahants are characterised by the qualities that lotus possesses. The concept of "in the world but not of the world" *(loke ṭhito lokena anupalitto)* is brought out quite comprehensively by the simile of lotus. It is pure, because it rises above its impure watery abode. It is perfect as it is fully blossomed. It is beautiful, therefore it is lovable by all. It is fragrant as it emanates sweet smell when it blossoms in the morning.

Therefore Buddhist artists down the ages used the lotus as a decorative motif in carvings of Buddhist monuments and shrines, to symbolise the spiritual purity of the Buddha and the Arahants. Later in the hands of different

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49 *"Puṇḍarikaṃ yathā vaggu toye na upalippati*
Na upalippāmi lokena, tasmā buddho'smi brāhmana" –*A.* iii, p.39

50 *"Yathā hi udake jātaṃ punḍarikaṃ pavḍḍhati*
Nopalippati toyena suci gandhaṃ manoramaṃ
Tatheva ca loke jāto Buddho loke vi harati
Nopalippati lokena toyena padumaṃ yathā" –*Theragāthā* 700

artists of different epochs the motif evolved into numerous conventional styles. These stylistic lotus motifs are found in the temple paintings in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

Swastika as a Symbol of Blessings

The swastika is also one of the popular symbols found in both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhist art. It is drawn depicting a cross with four arms deflecting at right angles either clockwise or anticlockwise. The Theravadins in later times usually depict both swastikas on the footprint of the Buddha while the Mahayanists represent the anticlockwise one on the chest of the Buddha Amitabha.

In Amaravati archaeological remains belonging to the 2nd century A.D., there are footprints of the Buddha with both kinds of swastikas. However in Anuradhapura of the same period the footprint with the clockwise representation is found. When the footprint began to be worshipped as a sacred object of worship in Theravada countries, both swastikas have been considered as essential as many other auspicious symbols carved on the replicas of the Buddha's footprint.

The Swastika as a symbol is of unknown origin. No one knows for certain where it originated. As revealed by archaeological excavations in the world, the swastika has been a symbol of many civilisations. Both swastikas have been excavated in the Indus Valley civilisation. The clockwise one is interpreted as the symbol of sun, the anti-clockwise one, moon. Again it is conjectured that, while the former represents the male principle, the latter, the female principle.[51] It was a symbol of ancient North American Indians and Celts who occupied a large part of Iron Age Europe.

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51 See *Decorative Elements of Indian Art* by K.C. Aryan

Hitler, motivated by his policy of "ariyanising" Germany, adopted it mistakenly believing it to be a pure Aryan symbol. Hindus, of course, have a claim to it, for it has been used even in pre-historic India.

The archaeologist Cunningham has shown that the symbol has been produced by the juxtaposition of two letters of Asokan script (*su* + *asti* = *swasti);* which may be a mere coincidence. Therefore according to him the symbol is a monogram carrying the import of blessings or auspiciousness.[52] It is in this sense that the Buddhists have used the swastika for centuries, but not as a symbol of mystic significance.

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[52] Sanskrit—English Dictionary by Monier Williams

Reflection on Death for Deathlessness

"Monks, these seven thoughts when made become, made an increase in, are very fruitful, of great advantage, plumbing the deathless, having the deathless as their goal. What seven?"

"The thought of the unattractive, of death, of the cloying of food, of all-world discontent, of impermanence, of ill therein, of no self in all."

"Satt'imā bhikkhave saññā bhāvitā bahulikatā mahapphalā honti mahānisaṃsā amatogadhā amatapariyosānā. Katamā satta?

Asubhasaññā, maraṇasaññā āhāre paṭikkūlasaññā, sabbaloke anabhiratasaññā, aniccasaññā anicce dukkhasaññā dukkhe anattasaññā."

—*A.* iv, p.46

6. Socialisation for Death in Buddhist Perspective

While envisaging a course of action to be followed for the betterment of one's quality of life in this very existence, Buddhism is also particular about death and dying, the most wonderful experience one has to go through only once in one's term of life. Can anybody deny the power and mastery it wields over our lives? It is a fact that not only every living thing, but also every existing phenomenon must succumb to death one day.

Death is usually considered taboo, a subject not to be discussed publicly and openly. Hence in the eyes of some, any kind of open exposition on death would amount to a pessimistic approach to life. Nevertheless, when we reflect on human life, death surely mocks our claims to wealth, power, prestige and position wielding its power over our lives. As Venerable Ratthapala said:[1]

> "Longevity is not acquired with wealth,
> Nor can prosperity banish old age,
> Short is this life, as all the sages say,
> Eternity it knows not, only change."

Inevitability of Death

The fact of death is reiterated in the scriptures with illustrative similes:

> "As there is fear, when fruits are ripe,
> That in the morning they will fall,

1 *M.* ii, pp.72 ff.

So mortals are in constant fear,
When they are born that they will die."

"And as the fate of pots of clay,
Once fashioned by the potters hand,
Or small or big or baked or raw,
Condemns them to be broken up,
So mortals' life leads but to death."[2]

"As though huge mountains made of rock,
So vast they reached up to the sky,
Were to advance from every side,
Grinding beneath all that lives,
So age and death roll over all,
Warriors, priests, merchants, and craftsman,
The outcastes and the scavengers,
Crushing all beings sparing none."

"And here no troops of elephants,
No charioteers, no infantry,
No strategy in form of spells,
No riches serve to beat them off."[3]

Facing Death with Understanding

But unfortunately, there is a tendency as it were, among relatives, friends and physicians to hide the fact of death from a dying person. On the contrary, it has been shown by studies on the subject that people die far more happily and contentedly if death is discussed with them beforehand. Modern psychological research has shown that denial of impending death leads to stress, depression and confusion creating a greater web of deception in the minds of

[2] *Sn.*, pp.576–7

[3] *S.* i,p.102

the dying. Consequently, the situation has led the psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross to identify five mental phases of a dying person: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and finally Acceptance.[4] Buddhism advocates a correct and sure method to share the mutual comfort with the dying and the living, and encourages its adherents to face death with dignity. Hence in Buddhism, open discussion and thoughtful reflection on death are encouraged to counter the tension, fear, depression and other mental traits that overwhelm the dying. Socialisation for death, according to the Buddhist approach is pragmatic and realistic. It tempts one to action and derive the best out of life while one is living. Take the case of a forest dwelling monk who reflects thus:

"I am now quite alone in the forest and living alone. A snake or a scorpion or a centipede may bite me and cause my death; and that would be a hindrance to me. I may stumble and fall, the food that I have eaten may make me ill and cause my death. I consort with fearsome creatures: lions, tigers, leopards, bears and hyenas. They may take my life and cause my death. I consort with thieves who either have done their deed or go about doing it. They may take my life and cause my death. There are fearsome nonhumans. They may take my life and cause my death.[5] So he determines to achieve his objective as quickly as possible.

Reflection on Death

For this purpose, Reflection on Death has been introduced as one of the subjects of the Buddhist meditative technique called concentration meditation, where the instructions are

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4 See *On Death and Dying,* New York 1969

5 *A.* iii, p.100

given to reflect on the universality of death. It is stated that Reflection on Death should be cultivated for the destruction of cankers.[6] There are five things to be contemplated often: One has not outstripped (a) old age (b) disease (c) death (d) all things near and dear are subject to variableness and (e) one is the result of one's own deeds, deeds are matrix, deeds are kin, deeds are foundation, whatever deed one does whether good or bad one is the heir to it. The contemplation on these have been prescribed as antidotes to obsessions rooted in youth, health, life, passionate desire for those who are dear and wrongful behaviour of body, word and mind.[7] Eight ways of reflecting on death have been described by Buddhaghosa in the Path of Purification.[8] In the technique of insight meditation, death comes under the purview of impermanence, which is taught as one of the three subjects of insight meditation. Reflection on death leading to socialisation for death is therefore an integral constituent in Buddhist discipline.

On the other hand, according to the Buddhist teaching of *kamma,* in the absence of a weighty *kamma,* the death-proximate *kamma* done by the dying person will become the determining thought-factor of his next birth. Therefore Buddhism admonishes the dying, to purge their minds from unwholesome defiling thoughts and face death with peace of mind and human dignity.

The Buddhist Analysis of Death

For this purpose death is analysed fundamentally on the Buddhist doctrinal basis into two types: (a) Momentary Death

6 *A.* iii, p.306

7 *A.* iii, p.70

8 *Vis.,* viii, p.8

and (b) Conventional Death. According to *Abhidhamma* analysis every mental as well as physical phenomenon persists only a very minute moment of time and then ceases to exist, giving rise to another. The process will continue mentally as well as physically. However, a difference between the two phenomena; mental and physical, has been noted. While mental phenomena persist only for seventeen thought moments of shorter duration in which each consists of three thought moments of arising, persistence and cessation, thus amounting to fifty-one shortest thought moments; matter continues to exist for the whole of fifty-one shortest thought moments. It is stated that because of the quick succession of the moments, the sequence of moments cannot be noticed. The second, the Conventional Death, is the end of life, the state of being dead, as we generally understand by the word death. Conventional Death is again discussed under two divisions: Timely Death and Untimely Death. Timely death is again classified into three:

i. Death with the exhaustion of merit
ii. Death with the exhaustion of one's life span and
iii. Death with the simultaneous exhaustion of both factors.

Untimely death results through *kamma* that interrupts the life's flow by the intervention of an adventitious cause such as an assault with a weapon or due to some other mishap.

Death, Dying and Psychotherapy

In the canon there are references where those who were at the verge of death have been led to face death peacefully, which implies more or less a psychotherapeutic approach to

purge the mind of the dying of obsessions that overwhelm their minds at death. Once the Buddha visited a sick ward in Vesali and advised a monk at the last stage of his life to meet his end collected and composed as the bodily endurance has come to its limit. The Buddha is recorded to have said addressing the monk that if anyone was ailing and weak, (a) abide seeing nothing attractive in the body, (b) be conscious of the cloying of food, (c) be conscious of distaste as to the world, (d) perceive impermanence in all compounded things, (e) set the inner self well on the thought of death, before long by destroying the cankers would enter and abide in the emancipation of the mind, he would be happy thereafter.[9] In the same way once Venerable Ananda, and on another occasion Venerables Sariputta and Ananda together, admonished Anathapindika, the treasurer, who was lying on his bed in distress and despair caused by severe physical pain. Venerable Sariputta reminding him that unlike uneducated many-folk he (Anathapindika) was loyal to the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha,* and that he was moral, virtuous, practising the Noble Eightfold Path, instructed him to reflect on all the virtues he possessed in order to allay his pains through right knowledge and right release. Thereat in a moment the pains of the housefather were allayed.[10] Similarly once Venerable Ananda admonished him when he was severely ill. Ananda, providing an emotional support as it were, asked him to get rid of terror, trembling and fear of death and be self reliant and steadfast in the face of death.[11]

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9 *A.* iii, p.142

10 *S.* v, p.383–5

11 *M.* iii, pp.258 ff.

Curing Depression for a 'Lucky' Death

In the last stage of the treasurer's life he suffered from an unbearable, acute pain in his brain and sent for Venerable Sariputta in search of a word of consolation. When Sariputta arrived, the treasurer was sinking fast, but he listened attentively with great respect to Sariputta who instructed him to look at every sense data objectively. The treasurer, being overjoyed by the exhortation, cried and shed tears of joy and passed away silently and was born in Tusita heaven.[12] In fact, helping a person to experience a 'lucky' death *(bhaddakaṃ maranaṃ)* as Venerable Sariputta has shown, is to be practised consciously by not being engrossed in worldly activity, talk, sleep, company, companionship and vain fancies.[13] Nakulamata was able to cure the depression in the mind of her husband, Nakulapita, by anticipating the causes of Nakulapita's depression. She said:

"My good householder, you should not die fretfully. Sorrowful is the death of the fretful. The death which is fretful has been decried by the Buddha. Maybe you think– Alas! When I am gone my good wife will not be able to support the children. Nor keep the household together. Or maybe you think– Alas! When I am gone my good wife will go to another. Or maybe you think– Alas! When I am gone my good wife will not keep the virtues in full. Or maybe you think– Alas! When I am gone my good wife will not gain the calm of heart. Or maybe you think– Alas! When I am gone my good wife will not win confidence and self-reliance and live in accordance with the Teacher's word".[14] As if reading

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12 *A.* iii, pp.292 ff.

13 *A.* iii, pp.294–8

14 *S.* v, pp.408–10

his mind she took one by one, the suppositions that disturbed his peace of mind, and gave her own explanation in the form of counseling. By listening to her, it is said that even as he lay there his sickness subsided.

Death, Dying and Rebirth

Replying to a question put by the Sakyan Mahanama as to how a discreet but afflicted lay disciple, suffering and at the verge of death, should be admonished by a discreet lay disciple, the answer given by the Buddha sheds light on the Buddhist doctrinal standpoint on death, rebirth and *kamma.* The Buddha says that a discreet lay disciple, who is at the last moment of his mortal existence, should be admonished by another discreet lay disciple with the four comfortable assurances of Buddha, *Dhamma, Sangha* and virtues dear to Ariyans. And then shift his mind respectively one to the other, showing that the succeeding one is better than the preceding one. Longing for parents, longing for children, longing for five human pleasures of senses, heavenly delights, four *Deva* realms, suite of the thirty-three, *Yama Devas,* creative *Devas, Devas* who rejoice in the work of other *Devas* and the Brahma world. Then he is asked to convince him, saying: "Life in the Brahma world is impermanent, not everlasting, a prison. Well for you, friend; if you raise your mind above the Brahma world and fix it on the cessation of personality belief." The Buddha continued: "If the dying person has done so, I declare that there is no difference between the lay disciple who has thus averted a dying person's attention and the monk whose heart is freed from the influxes; that is, between the release of the one and the release of the other".[15] Sarakani, who was in

[15] *S.* v, p.375

the habit of drinking, at the last stage of his life, gave up the habit and purged the mind of obsessions and became loyal to the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha* and adhered to moral behaviour. The Buddha declared him a stream-winner and he was born in a heavenly abode. However people were dissatisfied with the Buddha's proclamation, for they exclaimed: "A strange thing indeed! A wonder indeed! Nowadays anyone can become a stream-winner!

...Sarakani, the Sakyan failed in the training and took to drink!"

In this connection, Mahanama, the Sakyan went to see the Buddha and intimated those people's comment to the Buddha. Thereupon the Buddha, explaining the point in question in relation to those who practised the path in varying degrees of achievement, emphasised the fact, pointing out that if those sala trees over there could know what was ill-spoken and what was well spoken He would proclaim those trees also stream-winners.[16]

16 *S.* v, p.375

Living together in Amity and Concord

"We are different in body, venerable sir, but one in mind."

"Nānā hi no kho bhante kāyā ekaṃ ca papa mañño cittaṃ"

–Venerable Anuruddha to the Buddha, M. i, p.207

7. Social Conflicts: Causes and Cure

According to conflict theorists of sociology, conflict is an inevitable feature of society and many social changes are caused by tension between competing interests. Marx and Engels maintained that all history is the history of class conflict and conflict resolution is to be achieved only through violent means. "Violence" according to Marx "is the midwife of history". So much so Mao is said to have stated that "change comes from the barrel of a gun".[1]

But what does Buddhism say in regard to conflict in society? How does conflict originate? Buddhism goes to the root of the problem and advocates conflict resolution from individuals who are the integral constituents of society. In this connection two discourses found in the scriptures are worthy of examination.

The *Sakkapanha-sutta,* recorded as a dialogue between the Buddha and Sakka, the chief god of Tavatimsa heaven, the question of social conflicts has been discussed at length. When we examine the way the question has been posed in front of the Buddha by Sakka, conflict is to be understood as a natural phenomenon not only among men but also among other beings such as gods and semi-divine beings. What is significant is, even though a serious student may be prone to dismiss Sakka as a mythological figure, the crucial problem brought to light in the discourse and the answer given by the Buddha by way of explaining it, will strike him as an issue of sociological importance.

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1 Robertson Ian—*Sociology* pp.519–520, New York 1987

A Psychological Point of View

According to the discourse in question, Sakka asks the Buddha: "What is the reason that prompts the gods, men, *asuras, gandhabbas* and other classes of beings to be hateful, harmful, and envious of one another causing them to continue to live in conflict *(saverā sadaṇḍā sasapattā savyāpajjhā viharanti verino)* despite the fact that they wish to live all the time without those evil thoughts?" The Buddha's reply is an explanation of the causal genesis of conflicts from a psychological point of view:

> Envy *(issā)* and avarice *(macchariya)* > conflicts.
>
> Things dear *(piya)* and not dear *(appiya)* > envy and avarice.
>
> Desire *(chanda)* > things dear and not dear
>
> Thought conception *(vitakka)* > desire
>
> Concepts tinged with mind's prolific tendency *(papañcasaññā saṃkhā)* > thought conception.

Therefore in progressive order, concepts tinged with mind's prolific tendency > thought conception > desire > things dear and not dear > envy and avarice > conflict.

The question put by Sakka characterises the prevailing social conflict in the world over. The Buddha's explanation reveals its causal connection with the mental factors rooted in wrong attitude towards perception. Secondly, when Sakka wanted to know the method of practice *(paṭipadā)* to be followed for the resolution of conflict by which the concepts tinged with mind's prolific tendency could be eliminated, the Buddha elucidated the procedure to be followed: One may resort to happy feelings *(somanassa),* unhappy feelings *(domanassa)* and equanimity *(upekkhā),* but should be free

from thought conceptions *(vitakka)* and discursive thinking *(vicāra)* which contribute to unwholesome thoughts. Now Sakka comes out with an exposition of the restraints of the sense faculties which the Buddha endorses without comment. Herein the fact that the sense objects are twofold has been described in relation to wholesome thoughts and unwholesome thoughts. Out of the two, wholesome thoughts have to be associated with. This will enable one to put an end to concepts tinged with the prolific tendency of the mind. With regard to visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and mental objects, the same procedure has to be followed by the discerning disciple.[2] Afterwards Sakka asks another question to know the reason of the different standpoints found among the recluses and brahmins.

He asks: "Are all recluses and brahmins wholly of one view, one practice, one persuasion and one aim?"

The Buddha replies that the world is composed of people of many and diverse temperaments. And that being so, naturally people cling to this or that view and adhere strongly and tenaciously, to it and say, 'this alone is true and the rest is false'. Therefore they are not of one view, one practice, one persuasion and one aim and they have not attained to the right ideal.[3] The diversity of mind and body in humans and some kind of gods and those in woeful states are mentioned in another instance also.[4] The Buddhist view on the concept of the right to dissent is also clearly depicted in the assertion of human diversity. It is to be noted that as Buddhism accepts diversity among humans in relation

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2 *D.* ii, pp.276 ff.

3 *D.* ii, pp.284–5 *(anekadhātu nānādhātu kho devānaminda loko)*

4 *A.* iv, p.39 *(nānattakāyā nānattasaññā)*

to their physical bodies and minds, accordingly Buddhism recognises right to dissent as a prerogative of all humans which is alluded to in the *Kālāma-sutta,* the charter of free inquiry.[5]

A considerable part of the discourse addressed to Sakka evolves round the Buddhist theory of perception. The contribution of the perceptual process to conflicting situations that man faces here in the present life and the rebirth in the cyclic existence has been brought to light in this discourse. Man's subjective participation in differentiation or conceptual proliferation develops gradually to a degree of turning him to be a slave to the process. As a result he becomes a hapless object of the process by being subjected to the process.

An Ethical Point of View

Ethics deals with the rightness or wrongness of an action. In other words, its scope is human conduct together with the inner volitions and their motives. Being a normative science, it judges the value of an action in terms of good and evil. In this sense, the Buddha lays down a universal ethical criterion valid for all times and climes, which is neither subjective nor relative but objective and practical. The *Ambalaṭṭhika-rāhulovāda-sutta* drafts this practical method of avoiding social conflict from an ethical point of view.[6]

The first two paragraphs of the discourse that are more or less like an audio-visual lesson, illustrate with a vessel of water, the relationship between recluse-ship and telling

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5 Vide, Gnanarama P.—*An Approach to Buddhist Social Philosophy* pp. 10–28

6 *M.* i, pp.414–416

deliberate lies. With the simile of a king's elephant in battle, which has no concern to protect its trunk, can engage in any daring act in battle even at the cost of its life. In the same way, a person who has no shame to tell a deliberate lie can resort to commit any evil. The *Dhammapada* also expresses the same idea in emphatic terms:

"There is no evil that cannot be done by the liar who has transgressed the one law (of truthfulness) and who is indifferent to a world beyond".[7]

In fact, abstinence from telling lies is the fourth precept of a Buddhist. Telling a deliberate lie is also an offence of expiation as laid down in the Buddhist monastic discipline.[8] Why do people tell lies? Why are those who listen to lies deceived? Lies are told for the purpose of deceiving others to meet different kinds of ends. It has been shown by psychologists that people have a general tendency to believe something said as true. The liar exploits this 'weakness' of men for his own ends. When lying spreads in society in epidemic proportions, and the truth is eventually discovered, faith in social values is then shattered paving the path for social disintegration.

The discourse in question then continues to elaborate a criterion for good and evil with the aid of a simile of a mirror. Just as one looks at a mirror to see one's reflection one must repeatedly reflect on one's bodily, verbal and mental actions in three instances–before performance, while performing and after performance–in respect of three criteria: oneself, others and both oneself and others. So if an act causes affliction to oneself or others or both oneself and others

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7 *"Ekaṃ dhammaṃ atītassa musāvādissa jantuno vitiṇṇaparalokassa natthi pāpaṃ akāriyaṃ"—Dhp.* p.176

8 *"Sampajānamusāvade pācittiyaṃ"—Vin.* iv, p.2

(attabyābādhāya parabyābādhāya ubhayabyābādhāya saṃvattati), that is an unwholesome action. If one happens to realise while in the process of performing that the action that one is performing is unwholesome, one should abandon it forthwith. After the performance, if he realises that it is an unwholesome action, it should be 'intimated, confessed, revealed, laid open' either to the Buddha or to a learned fellow brahma-farer and then restraint undertaken in the future.[9]

Truly, conflict is a natural phenomenon in society where there are individuals of diverse temperaments. But when conflict turns to brawls and rumpuses, peaceful coexistence in society is jeopardised thereby ruining individual and social progress. Therefore while refraining from telling deliberate lies, one should evaluate objectively one's actions in three instances: before performance, while performing and after performance, in relation to one's own welfare, that of others and of both one's own and others.

9 *M.* i. pp.417 ff. The aspect of social concern of this criterion is discussed in the first chapter of this book.

Wisdom Knows No Gender

In every circumstance a man does not act wisely. A woman does act wisely, wherever she is attentive.

"Na hi sabbesu ṭhānesu puriso hoti paṇdito
Itthi'pi paṇḍitā honti tattha tattha vicakkhaṇā"

–Kunḍalakesi Vatthu, DhA. II, 217ff.

8. Woman's Social Role Redefined

Woman's liberation and her social role are questions often discussed today. Therefore it is not impertinent to see how early Buddhism looked at woman and her liberation in general and how it defined her social role in particular, against the contemporary social milieu in North India.

Every culture in the world expects men and women of that culture to play their respective gender roles assigned to them by that culture. Because the human species also, just as other species, is divided into two fundamental divisions: 'male' and 'female' or 'man' and 'woman', on biological grounds based on sex distinction. But as we know, 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are secondary non-biological classifications, resulting in individual effect of what one has become due to the socialisation process. As accepted in every culture, social roles of males and females are gender roles defined in relation to their behaviour, dressing, hairstyle, occupation, deportment, duties and obligations. Gender roles may differ from culture to culture. Sociologically, the social status of males and females are unequal and based on the social norms of that particular culture. Because of this fact, today, women's movements throughout the world, basing their arguments on scientific findings, challenge the feasibility of roles assigned to them traditionally and assert that supposed differences are not biological but cultural.

The Ideology of Sexism versus Changing Social Roles

What we see today is something different from what had

been attributed to each sex from the time of recorded history. The traditional status assigned to the sexes has been violated to a greater extent, specially the traditional gender role of females has been challenged and changed today, due to the participation of many women in economic activity. The opening up of new avenues to acquire skills other than domestic skills enabled them to change their lifestyle with a good income and hence to win independence from the other sex. They are very competitive in the job market and have won the right to enter many professions which had been confined only to males previously. Sexism or prejudice and discrimination against women on the ground that they are inferior and therefore unequal treatment is justifiable is being challenged by movements organised to fight the inequality of status and to safeguard women's rights.

Woman's Social Role in Buddhism: Two Methods of Study

The social role of woman envisaged in Buddhism can be studied by two different methods. Firstly, by studying the numerous references on women scattered over the Pali canonical literature and analysing them to find out the underlying principles of these issues of Buddhist teaching. Secondly, by examining the role of woman in the countries where Buddhism became the dominant religion of the people in different stages of the history of those countries. It is noticeable that in the countries where Buddhism spread, woman enjoyed and presently enjoys greater freedom and liberality in society than the countries where the ideology of sexism prevails. In this chapter, we shall confine ourselves to the former method and try to find out the Buddhist ideology behind the issue.

Industrial Revolution and Feminism

Evidently, rapid social changes in our age of science and technology have affected immensely the life of modern woman. She has won many a right equal to men but still she has not been able to cast off the shackles fully, by which she is bound to traditional ideologies dominating the respective cultures. The Industrial Revolution on the one hand and ideological concepts of liberty, equality and fraternity, the objectives of the French Revolution and egalitarianism advocated in political sphere on the other, paved the way for the rise of feminism. But some sociologists are of the opinion that "the post-feminist generation of women today takes the benefits of women's liberation for granted, yet is dubious about the burdens of being the perfect wife, mother and executive. For the time at least, many women feel themselves stuck midway in a revolution that has run out of steam".[1]

The Buddhist attitude to woman's social role has to be viewed therefore, in the context of Indian society of two and half millenniums ago, where the problem was never thought of from a woman's point of view. It was a period where the problems of suffrage, equality of opportunities, sexual freedom, the possession and control of property or simply, feminism envisaging women's rights and liberation had not yet even been thought of. Herein, therefore, we shall try to analyse the material found in the Buddhist canonical Pali texts and find out the social position of Indian Woman at the time of the rise of Buddhism in order to understand the Buddhist reaction to it on the basis of those references.

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1 Robertson, Ian–*Sociology* p.330. See also *Success and Betrayal: The Crisis of Women in Corporate America* by Sarah Hardesty and Nehema Jacobs, New York 1986

Unequal Treatment and Discrimination

In any society where the male plays the dominant role, the female is given a subordinate position. Victory in battle and heroic sons to fight enemies, were two of the aspirations of the Ancient Indo-Aryans. By begetting sons only both of these wishes could be fulfilled. As Westermark showed in his "History of Human Marriage", primitive societies preferred to have male progeny rather than female in order to fight enemies and to do work which required much labour and exertion. As shown by him further, because of this reason, in primitive societies female children were killed as soon as they were born. Although we do not know whether girls were killed in the Vedic age as soon as they were born, we have a reference in the Taittiriya Samhita to the effect that the birth of a boy was celebrated joyously rather than a girl's birth. It is stated there that when a girl was delivered, the midwife kept her aside silently, but if the woman had given birth to a boy she lifted it up and showed it to the people.[2] Besides, Atharvaveda prescribes special mantras to be chanted together with rites to be performed for the purpose of obtaining a male child.[3] According to Aitareya Brahmana, a son fulfills all the expectations of a family while a daughter is an extra burden to the family.[4]

Whatever be the social position of woman in the early Vedic age, with the passage of time, noticeably, her social position has deteriorated due to the intrusion of brahmanic influence. At the beginning of the Christian era widow marriage came to be regarded as unholy and child marriage was introduced into Hindu society. Inter-caste

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2 *Taittiriya Sambita* VI, 5, 10

3 *Atharvaveda* III, 23, VI, II

4 *Aitareya Brahman* VII, 18

marriage was looked down upon with contempt. In addition, the dowry system evolved to the extent of making the matrimony of a girl of marriageable age next to impossible. A daughter given in marriage with insufficient dowry might have been subjected to harassment and torture in the hands of husbands and in-laws, as is very often reported in the press even in modern India. As the parents who had daughters had to encounter these social realities they might have become reluctant to have daughters. The introduction of Suttee (or 'sati'), the self-immolation of widows on their husbands' funeral pyres due to the coercion of the dead husband's relatives by about the 5th century A. D., might have been another factor that contributed to the parents' reluctance.[5]

Ideological Backup

Hindu law provided the necessary ideological support to strip off the Hindu women's religious, social and human rights. In fact Manusmrti, the Laws of Manu, states specifically:

> "There is no sacrifice or religious vow for women. The obedience to their husbands alone is sufficient for them to be born in heaven".[6]

Hindu Law prohibited initiation for women. Altekar says that it is a deprivation of women's religious rights degrading them to the state of Sudras.[7] Even the Bhagavadgita,

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5 The British officially abolished the practice in 1829 but as reported in the press it is still practised in rural parts of the country

6 Nāsti strinām prthag yagño– na vratam nāpyaposanam patih svarūyite yena– tena svrge mahīyate–Manusmrti v, 61

7 Altekar A.S.–The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation pp. 14–15

equating women with vaisyas and sudras, goes to the extent of saying that women are born of evil *(pāpayonayah)* just as vaisyas and sudras.[8]

Women were deprived of their rights in every way. The Manusmrti devoting its 9th chapter entirely to laws pertaining to women states:

> "Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, her sons protect (her) in old age. A woman is never fit for independence".[9]

Accordingly, women's social movements have to be watched attentively, for they are often prone to sexual misconduct.

> "Women do not care for beauty nor is their attention fixed on age, (thinking it is enough that) he is a man they give themselves to the handsome and the ugly".[10]

According to the Manusmrti, they are always apt to transgress:

> "Through their passion for men, through their mutable temperament, through their natural disaffection, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however carefully they were guarded (in this world)".[11]

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8 The text is:
Mām hi pārtha vyapāsritya–ye'pi syuh pāpayonayah
Striyo vaisyastathāsudras–te'pi yānti parām gatih–IX, 32
Traditionally it is interpreted to show that there is no distinction among women, Vaisyas and Sudras for the attainment of the Supreme State!

9 Pitā raksati kaumārye –bhartā raksati yauvane sthāvire raksanti putrāh–na stri svātantryamarhati–Manusmrti IX, 3

10 Naitarūpam pariksante–na sā vayasi saṃsthitih surūpaṃ vā virūpaṃ vā–pumā nityaiva bhunjate–Manusmrti IX, 14

11 *Pauscalyāt calacittasca –naisnaihacca svabhāvatah*

The position allotted to women is theocentric and premeditated by the creator god at the creation:

> "(As Prajapati has ascribed to them in the creation) Manu allotted to women (love of their) bed, seat and ornaments, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct".[12]

A Different Perspective

The Buddhist view of woman being quite contrary to the Hindu view of woman with its later developments, describes the role of woman in relation to man and society taking her position into account as a social being. Sociologically, her status as wife as well as mother and housewife, has been redefined by the Buddha, against the humiliating social condition ascribed to her by traditional Indian society. The. Buddha's approach is reformative, nevertheless, can be considered revolutionary in the context of the contemporary social setting. As shown by Jotiya Dhirasekera and a number of other writers on the subject, by the time Buddhism had arisen, to a greater extent, the rights of women had been curtailed in India.[13]

Buddhism is not a religion which encourages war and violence. Therefore there is no specific demand in Buddhism to have sons to fight enemies. Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism does not advocate the religious rite of transferring merits to departed fathers only by sons. Buddhism does not uphold any kind of theory of creation as found in the Book

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raksitāyatnatopi'ha– bhartasvetā vikurvate–Manusmrti IX, 15

12 *Sayyasanamalamkāram-kāmakrodhamanārjavam drohabhāvam kucaryā ca–stribhyomanurakalpayam–Manusmrti* IX, 17

13 Dhirasekera Jotiya–Buddhist Monastic Discipline p.137

of Genesis of the Judeo-Christian tradition to the effect that God having created man first in his own image, created woman as a secondary act of the process of creation. Unlike Judaism, Buddhism has no kind of prayer, rite or ritual to perform or to thank any divine agent or to one's own providence for the fact of being born a male, not being a female.[14]

The Inauguration of the Order of Nuns

Historically, just as Buddhism was critical about the caste system, sacrifice and other dogmatic views of brahmins, the social status ascribed to women by Brahmins was also criticised and redefined by Buddhism. But due to some historical reasons, later, brahmanic views which were deeprooted in Indian soil superseded. Even as the caste system infiltrated the *sangha* and incorporated with excuses together with some other Hindu beliefs and customs, the redefined status of women seemed to have been ignored, if not fully rejected. Although a tendency towards an ascetic ideal is apparent, Buddhism advocates a middle path as a religion. Hence the laity both men and women were considered equal in the Buddhist community and known as *upasakas* and *upasikas.* In addition to the order

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14 A daily prayer expected to be sung by an Orthodox Jew is: "Blessed art thou, oh Lord our God, king of the Universe, that I was not born as a gentile. Blessed art thou, oh Lord our God, king of the Universe, that I was not born a slave. Blessed art thou, oh Lord our God, king of the Universe, that I was not born a woman". –See *Sociology* pp.320–1 by Ian Robertson

Cf. "O Mankind, keep your duty to your Lord who created you from a single soul and from it created its mates (of same kind) and from them twain has spread a multitude of men and women" (Qur'an 4:1)

of monks, the inauguration of the order of nuns for women made the equality of rights and opportunities, a reality in the Buddhist community.

As stated in the Buddhist scriptures, a woman brought up in an ethically congenial atmosphere leads a happy and successful life as a lay woman. She being endowed with 1. faith 2. virtue 3. wisdom 4. generosity and 5. learning derives the benefit of living, in this very life.[15] On another occasion it is stated that if she is 1. not grudging 2. not envious 3. not stingy 4. not adulterous 5. moral 6. of wide knowledge and 7. energetic, a woman makes her life fruitful both in this life and in the next.[16]

In some cultures the supposed inferiority ascribed to woman was perpetrated as a divine plan. During the time of the Buddha, in India too, woman was considered inferior to man in several respects, but Buddhism rejecting this view has emphasised the fact that the intelligence quotient of a person does not depend upon divine intervention or biological factors such as cranium size or the brain structure. What we see is Buddhism, accepting in principle woman's ability to attain the highest religious goal, opening the door of the dispensation to them. As recorded in the *Cullavagga,* the order of nuns was established on the equality of woman's status for the realisation of the highest ideal state *(babbho ānanda mātugāmo... pabbajitvā sotāpattiphalaṃ vā... arahattaphalaṃ vā sacchikātuṃ).* The ordination of women is not a sacrament in Buddhism. The Buddha did not reject the plea of Mahapajapati Gotami and later the request of Ananda outright. As it seems, He dissuaded them for practical reasons: of social environment, problems of

[15] *S.* IV, p.250

[16] *S.* IV, pp.243–4

accommodation, protection and the like.[17] What is significant is that, after the humble submission of Ananda, the Buddha put her on par with man affirming her equal intellectual capacity and religious rights.

The widespread Indian belief of her comparative inferiority has been put into the mouth of Mara, where Mara is said to have expressed thus in front of Soma Theri:

> "It is not possible for a woman with her two-inch-deep wisdom to attain the highest, which is attained by the sages".

She retorts:

> "When the mind is well concentrated and wisdom is not failing in seeing the right, the fact of being a woman makes no difference"[18]

In the same vein we find in the *Theri-Apadana* an invitation to Mahapajapati Gotami to perform miracles in order to dispel the doubt of fools who are doubtful about women's ability to realise the doctrine.[19] These should be con-

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17 Gnanarama P. Ven. – *The Mission Accomplished,* Chapter 7 on The Dispensation and the Position of Women, pp. 62–79, where the setting up of the order of nuns is discussed fully. According to a Reuters report that appeared on 23/5/98 in Sri Lankan paper 'Daily News', Pope John Paul addressing a gathering of U.S. Bishops on a visit to the Vatican has said that priesthood is not an equality issue and that the Church had no authority to change the status quo. The report further stated: "The Pontiff said the priesthood was a sacrament given by God as a gift to the Church and then the individual, so ordination was not something that could be claimed by anyone as a right."

18 *S.* I, p.129

19 *Thīnarṃ dhammābhisamaye ye bālā vimatiṃ gatā tesaṃ diṭṭhi*

sidered as Buddhist replies at the time, addressed to the popular opinion about women.

As recorded in the *Bhikkhuni Khandhaka* of the *Cullavagga,* the Buddha wanted at the formative period of the order of nuns to thrive on the guidance, supervision and protection of the monks' order, which was senior in long-standing and experience. Because of this reason, the monks were entrusted with the task of conferring higher ordination on nuns and the nuns were instructed to discipline themselves in the precepts relevant to both sexes and not to adhere to those precepts which were not applicable to them. Also taking the unbecoming accusation of the laity on the monk's frequenting the nunneries, nuns were taught by stages, not only the procedures of fortnightly *patimokkha* recital and formal confessional meetings but also the procedures to be followed in disciplinary acts and settling disputes. It is noteworthy in this connection, although later nuns themselves were given the authority of conferring the higher ordination on nuns, the Buddha did not revoke the original permission given to monks to confer higher ordination on nuns. Therefore the permission granted to monks to ordain nuns remains valid even up to now.

The Role of Woman as Wife

We cannot imagine a human society consisting only of men or only of women either. Presumably, a man becomes a husband and a woman becomes a wife in forming the family unit. But comparatively Buddhism has developed a sympathetic attitude towards the woman's lot, in consideration

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pahānatthaṃ iddhiṃ dassehi gotami–Theri Apadana, 535
See also Dhirasekera Jotiya–*Buddhist Monastic Discipline,* p.139

of her social position at the time. Obviously, it is because of this reason that Buddhism uses the term *mātugāma* to denote woman-folk. The term, however, though is rendered into English idiom as woman-folk, actually means 'mother-folk' (*mātu* means mother and *gāma* is in the sense of 'group', from its several implications; *dārā* is wife. The grammatical gender of both of these words is masculine! In later texts however *dārā* is used as a feminine stem). Moreover, with a deep sense of sympathy, the mental and physical suffering or the woes particular to women *(āvenikani dukkhāni)* apart from a man, are listed in the canon:

1. A woman at a tender age has to leave her relatives behind and go to live in her husband's house
2. She is destined to undergo the pains of periodical menstruation
3. She has to bear the burden of pregnancy
4. She experiences labour pains at delivery
5. She has to wait upon a man (whether she likes or not)[20]

The Buddhist attitude to woman is expressed further by delineating the five powers *(pañca balāni)* of a woman: 1. Beauty 2. Wealth 3. Relatives 4. Children and 5. Virtue. It is stated that a woman endowed with these five powers, while living at home with confidence, overpowers her husband and gets the better of him. It is emphasised that even though she is devoid of the former four things save the fifth she can wield power in her husband's household. Also Buddhism asserts further that there are husbands who exert their power of authority *(issariya bala)* over their wives.[21]

[20] *S.* IV, p.239

[21] *S.* IV, p.246

A wife is not considered a bondservant of her husband as in Hindu law. The relationship between the two is considered bilateral and reciprocal according to the Buddhist concept of a family.[22] A wife who is charming to her husband and vice versa has five qualities: 1. Beauteous in form 2. Possesses wealth 3. Virtuous 4. Clever and not lethargic and 5. Produces children.[23] These are considered as the admirable qualities of a wife as well as of a husband.

No Double Standard of Chastity in Buddhism

In some of the cultures in the world, there was and is still a double standard of chastity for husband and wife. Social history records how for generations women in North African tribes have been subjected to a barbaric operation to remove their clitoris with the belief of reducing their sex urge to make them chaste. And also in medieval Europe how wives were kept under lock and key with chastity belts to ensure their chastity in the absence of their husbands. These beliefs seem to have evolved on the supposed superiority of man at creation and his absolute sexual power over woman. Therefore Marxism went to the extent of saying that the first class struggle in the world began with the subjugation of woman by man. Hindu law ascribing a subordinate position to woman at Brahma's creation, introduced a double standard of morality; for that matter, laid down a double standard of chastity for husband and wife. For it is stated in the Manusmrti:

"Although the husband is immoral, lustful in behaviour and devoid of good qualities, the wife should wait on him,

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[22] For a detailed discussion see Gnanarama P. Ven.–*An Approach to Buddhist Social Philosophy* pp.33–43

[23] *S.* IV, p.238

always regarding him highly as a god."[24]

On the contrary, the abstinence from sexual misconduct *(kāmesu micchācārā veramani)* in the fundamental five precepts of laity is for both men and women. As Buddhism does not advocate a double standard of chastity, both husband and wife are instructed to be moral. It is mentioned in the Advice to Sigala that husband and wife should be faithful to each other. As the wife is the best friend of the husband *(bhariyā'va paramā sakhā),* they together have to work with mutual understanding and friendship. Adultery is considered an evil to be avoided. Therefore, as what we find in post-industrial societies in epidemic proportion, wife beating, child abuse or absolute sexual rights amounting to raping spouses, could not exist in an ideal Buddhist family.[25] Confident living in households is ensured by the adherence to the five precepts. Women who are protected by mother, father, mother and father, brother, sister or relatives, who have a husband, who are protected by law and even with those who are garlanded in token for betrothal are particularly mentioned in the *Sāleyyaka* and *Sevitabbāsevitabba-suttas* in the *Majjhima Nikāya,* to be avoided in sustaining sexual relations beyond the legally permitted limit of a male.[26] As Buddhism always does, virtuousness has been given the pride of place even for the betterment of married life. Five conditions have been mentioned as hard to be won by a woman who has wrought no merits but easily won by a woman who has wrought merits:

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24 *"Visilah kāmavrtto vā gunau va parivarjitah upacryāh striyā sādhvyā satatam devavadpatih"—Manusmrti* 5. 154

25 *D.* iii, 180 ff. In some of the states in America, wife-rape has been made illegal

26 *S.* iv, p.250. *M.* i, p.286; *M.* iii, p.46

1. To be born into a proper family
2. To be married to a proper husband
3. To be married and live without a rival (co-wife)
4. To produce children
5. To gain mastery over her husband[27]

Since we have references to co-wives, polygamy seems to have been practised to a certain extent. In the *Therigāthā*, we see how acute was the problem. The nun Uppalavanna recollects how both mother and daughter had to live as co-wives of a husband:

> "In enmity we lived, bound to one man,
> Mother and daughter both as rival wives!
> O what a woeful plight I found, was ours,
> Unnatural offence! My hair stood up."
>
> –*Therigāthā* 224

Another nun, Isidasi, relates how she was driven away by several husbands although she served them as a slave and finally wedded to a polygamous husband:

> "Now in my sixteenth year, when I
> Blossomed a maiden, that same merchant's son,
> Giridasa the name of him, loved me
> And made me wife. Another wife he had."
>
> –*Therigāthā* 445

Then she recounting the past, relates how disunity erupted among them. Perhaps Kisagotami is very expressive in giving vent to her feelings:

> "Woeful is woman's lot! hath he declared,

[27] *S.* iv, p.249

Tamer and Driver of the hearts of the men:
Woeful in sharing homes with hostile wives,
Woeful when giving birth in bitter pain,
Some seeking death, or e'er they suffer twice,
Piercing the throat; the delicate poison take.
Woe too when mother-murdering embryo
Comes not to birth, and both alike find death.

–*Therigāthā* 216, 217

Family: A Role Model

In many places of the canon Nakulapita and Nakulamata have been praised as an ideal Buddhist couple who lived until their ripe old age and death in conjugal love.[28] Social awareness of Buddhism that comes to light by this episode of the couple was highly appreciated and they were praised by the Buddha, more or less, as a role model of a happy family. Not long after, Nakulapita recovered from his physical illness and depression, because of the careful attendance and counselling of his wife, both of them visited the Buddha. The Buddha then said to him:

"It has been to your gain good man, you have greatly gained, good man, in having had the good wife, Nakulamata, full of compassion, desiring your weal, as a counsellor, as a teacher. Indeed, so long as I have white-clad women lay disciples, folk with homes, who keep the virtues in full, who gain the calm of heart within the self, who in this doctrine and discipline win to the firm ground and live in the Teacher's word, your good wife is one of them."[29]

They were very happy and revealed in front of the

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28 *A.* ii, p.61; *A.* iii. p.292 ff; *A.* iv, pp.92–93; p.266; p.245; *S.* i, p.1; *S.* iv, p.115; *S.* v, pp.408–410

29 *A.* iii, p.298

Buddha how they spent their long married life in peace, harmony and mutual understanding with each other and expressed their willingness to be husband and wife in the next life too.[30] In the often quoted *Sigalovada-sutta* also the Buddha explained how the unity between spouses can be maintained and familial relationship developed with care and understanding.

Woman as Mother and Housewife

According to conflict theorists, gender inequality is a kind of social stratification. As is well known, to Engels and other Marxist theorists marriage represents the first class antagonism in history due to the fact that wife and children have become the monopoly of the husband. But the functionalist theorists of sociology assert that the modern family should have two adult partners specialised in two roles, complimentary to each other. One is the 'instrumental' role of the husband and the other is the 'expressive' role of the wife. The husband while playing the role of father binds the relationship between the family and the outside world. He being the supporter of his family, plays an active 'instrumental' role to earn an income and provide material support for the family's upkeep. The wife being mother and housewife plays an 'expressive' role looking after the household affairs, bringing up children and providing the emotional support of love and care needed to bind the family together.[31] Unlike among animals, where procreation is confined to a short mating period or season, human marriage is recognised as a union with many obli-

30 *A.* ii, p.61; *A.* iv. p.92–93; See also the chapter 6 of this book

31 Parsons, Talcott – *The Structure of Social Action,* New York 1937 and Robertson Ian – *Sociology,* New York 1987

gations and responsibilities. The human child needs care and attention, presumably from the mother, for several years even after it can stand on its feet and walk, which is not the case in the animal kingdom.

As it seems, these two roles of husband and wife have been taken for granted and redefined in Buddhism. Buddhism is pertinent about the role of mother and father as the first teachers of a child *(mātāpitaro pubbācariyāt'i vuccare).* The mother is referred to as the nurse *(āpādikā),* giver of milk *(posikā)* and she who shows the world *(imassa lokassadessetarā)* to the child.

The Buddha's attitude in this regard is well illustrated in His admonition to King Pasenadi Kosala who was disappointed on hearing that his Queen Mallika had given birth to a girl:

> "A woman-child, O Lord of men, may prove
> Even a better offspring than a male.
> For she grows up wise and virtuous,
> Her husband's mother rev'rencing, true wife.
> The child she may bear may do great deeds,
> And rule great realms, yea such a son
> Of noble wife becomes his country's guide."[32]

Her role as housewife is defined in the *Sigalovada-sutta* and other places. A recurring list of eight qualities which aids a housewife to be victorious in this life *(ihaloka vijaya)* and the next *(paralokavijaya)* are mentioned in the *Anguttara Nikāya.* The four practices that enable a housewife to be victorious in this life are:

1. Whatever her husband's home industries are, whether in wool or cotton, therein she is deft and

[32] *S.* i, p.86

clever, gifted with an inquiring turn of mind into all such undertakings, she is able to arrange and carry them out. In this way she is capable at her work.

2. Whatever her husband's household consists of–slaves, messengers or workers—she knows the work of each by what has been done; she knows their remissness by what has not been done; she knows the strength and the weakness of the sick; she divides the hard and soft food, each according to his share. In this way she manages the servants.
3. What her husband reckons to be unlovely, that she would not commit for her very life's sake.
4. Whatever money, corn, silver or gold her husband brings home, she keeps it secure by watch and ward; and of it she is no robber, thief, carouser or spendthrift.

The five qualities that are helpful to be victorious in the next world are:

1. She has faith and believes in the Awakening of the Tathagata, thinking: "of a truth He is the Exalted One, Arahant…." Such is her faith.
2. She abstains from taking life, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking liquor, which causes intoxication and heedlessness.
3. She dwells at home with heart purged from the stain of avarice, given over to charity, openhanded, delighting in giving, accessible, she finds joy in giving. Such is her charity.
4. She is wise and endowed with wisdom into the way of the rise and fall of things, with Ariyan penetration of the way to the utter destruction of

suffering. Such is her wisdom.[33]

Noticeably, what has been enunciated for the success of the housewife's present life is grounded on the conventional marriage that forms the nucleus family unit. As defined, even within the context of the traditional family framework, she is expected to play a dominant role in the family's economy. By being skilful in cottage industries and paying due regard to economic ventures set up in connection with the household, she is expected to be aware of the work force at work and the abilities and disabilities of the individual workers. Thus she has been advised to be a source of the family's income by developing her skills in management of the family's industries. This concept is far more conducive to woman's freedom than the attitude of husbands in the feudal Europe, where wives were made to become 'show pieces' of husbands' glory and spend their time at home doing nothing.

What we can conclude from the above discussion is quite clear. The Buddha's liberal attitude towards the woman-folk is far ahead of His time and clime. It even contrasts with the social position ascribed to her not only in the Indian culture at the time, but also with her position in Western culture until recent times. The tendency in Western culture is undoubtedly theocentric for St. Paul is said to have asserted that man was not created for the sake of woman but woman was created for the sake of man."[34]

The same sentiment is expressed in Epistle of the Apostle

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[33] *A.* iv, pp.262–273 Discourses addressed to elder Anuruddha, Nakulamata, Visakha and the monks.

[34] "A man… is the image of God and reflects God's glory…. Man was not created for the sake of woman, but woman was created for the sake of man" – 1 Corinthians 11:7–9

to the Ephesians incorporated in the New Testament.[35]

It has been shown that Protestant Christianity was founded on the conviction that the individual, not the church, was responsible for one's salvation. Therefore in theory it was applicable to both sexes. But the Protestant church in the reformation era believed strongly in the inferiority of women. Martin Luther, the German Protestant Reformist (1483–1546), thought that they were not fit for priesthood and they should stay at home. Calvin, the French Protestant Reformist (1509–1564), expressing his agreement with Luther maintained that woman's submission to man was ordained by God. Paradoxically on the other hand sustaining the equality of status in having direct contact with God without any sex discrimination both of them went to the extent of attacking the Catholic Church on its belief that women were unclean and agents of devil. Anyway, the suppression pent up with ideological support exploded and later there appeared in Europe those who advocate free love and the freedom of women against conventional marriage.[36]

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[35] "Wives should regard their husbands as they regard the Lord, since as Christ is head of the church and serves the whole body, so is husband the head of his wife; and as the church submits to Christ, so should wives submit to their husbands in everything"–*Ephesians* 5: 22–23.
See also Robertson Ian –*Sociology,* p. 321, where he states: "Even today many denominations reserve their priesthoods or equivalent positions for men—although, as women gain greater equality elsewhere in society, they are achieving higher statuses in religion also"

[36] Evans Richard J.–*The Feminists,* p.17, London, Revised Edition) 1987
Bullough Vernon L.–*The Subordinate Sex. A History of Attitudes towards Women,* pp.129 ff., Illinois 1973

The Code Napoleon and the Rights of Women

This tendency is different from the reciprocal friendly relationship envisaged in the early Pali canonical texts. In Europe, it has been shown that they were afraid of the upsurge of the feminist movement on the ground that it would ruin the patriarchal family system. Though the French Revolution was an impetus to the feminist movement, Rousseau was anti-feminist while Voltaire was sympathetic to women's claims. On the whole, as the Revolution of 1789 failed to vouchsafe its benefits for women, later reviewing the Revolution women activists named it as "the apotheosis of masculinity." The inferiority of women was guaranteed with the introduction of the Civil Law Code drafted by the Revolution and later introduced by Napoleon under the title 'Code Napoleon'. Napoleon is said to have expressed his opinion on women, once saying: "What we ask of education is not that girls should think, but that they should believe.[37] Napoleon's contempt for women is reflected in the code just as we find Manu's antipathy to women in the Hindu Law Code, the Manusmrti, which is said to have been compiled several centuries ago, somewhere between 500 B.C.–300 B.C. Richard J. Evans summarises what the Code Napoleon, backed by Catholic Church, closely allied to the state from the time of Napoleon say about women:

"The husband has full legal powers over his wife, her property and children, powers which extended, through his relatives, beyond the grave. The wife was legally obliged to obey her husband, and could not engage in legal transactions without his approval (i. e. she was a legal minor). If

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37 Evans Richards J – *The Feminists,* p.125, London (Revised Edition) 1979
Bidelman Patrick *K,– France in Modern Times,* p. 90, Chicago 1960

the wife committed adultery, she could be imprisoned for two years and divorced, and if she was caught in the act and killed by her husband, he could not be charged with murder. A husband, however, could commit adultery with impunity. Only if he introduced a permanent mistress into the household could he be sued for divorce by his wife, and she had no legal protection if she committed an act of violence against him in these circumstances. Such conduct did not render the husband liable to imprisonment either; the most he had to fear was a fine of 2,000 francs. Based on these premises, the case law of the early and midnineteenth century brought more circumscriptions of women's rights. Further legal restrictions forbade women to attend political meetings or to wear trousers and made unchaperoned females liable to arrest by the Morals Police as prostitutes."[38]

Later, with modifications from time to time, the Code was introduced into a number of European countries as a result of the conquests of Napoleon. It is still in force in Belgium. It was the model for the civil codes of Quebec Province of France in Canada, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, some Latin American republics and the state of Louisiana. Evidently under this European and American background we have to evaluate Miss Horner's unwarranted assertion that Buddhism has not attributed the equality of status to woman.[39]

Because of the rapid progress that man has achieved in numerous fields during the past two hundred years, roles attributed to males and females have changed considerably. John Stuart Mill's essay published in 1869 is said to be the

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[38] Evans Richard J.–*The Feminists,* p.124, London (Revised Edition) 1979

[39] Horner LB. –*Women Under Primitive Buddhism,* p. XXIV ff.

'Feminist Bible', which made an enormous impact on women throughout the world. The rising cost of living, the problem of equality of opportunities and also many other issues of inequality have caused the feminist movements to fight for woman's rights. Although she has been dragged back to her former position in some countries advocating Islam fundamentalism, now she is no longer passive. In the past two hundred years, in Europe as well as in the States, she fought hard under the threats of hooliganism and abuses for her independence and for her rights. Not only in post-industrial countries but also in many parts of the world, she enjoys many a right including suffrage and equality of opportunities which she had been hitherto deprived of. She can now become an independent wage earner. The present social atmosphere has enabled her to strip the gender role ascribed to her in former days. Nevertheless, in some countries in the world, particularly in the developing countries, her workload seems to be very heavy, she being driven to double her obligations–working as a mother and a housewife and concurrently being a wage earner. She has been forced to work under these circumstances, sometimes in unhygienic conditions for 12–14 hours a day, which result in her having a physical as well as a mental breakdown. Because of these reasons, some say that the foundations of traditional institutions of marriage and family are already shattered. Therefore, in near future, there will come a time to redefine not only gender roles, but the institution of marriage and family as well. What we have tried to show here is that the woman's social role as redefined in early Buddhism against the background of the conservative nucleus family is very reformative and liberal in the Indian social context of two thousand five hundred year ago.



The Buddha in Samādhi Posture and in Dhammacakka Mudra—Sarnath, India. Note the Dhammacakka below (see p.138)



Bodhisatta's self-mortification—Gandhara (see p.150; ff.28)



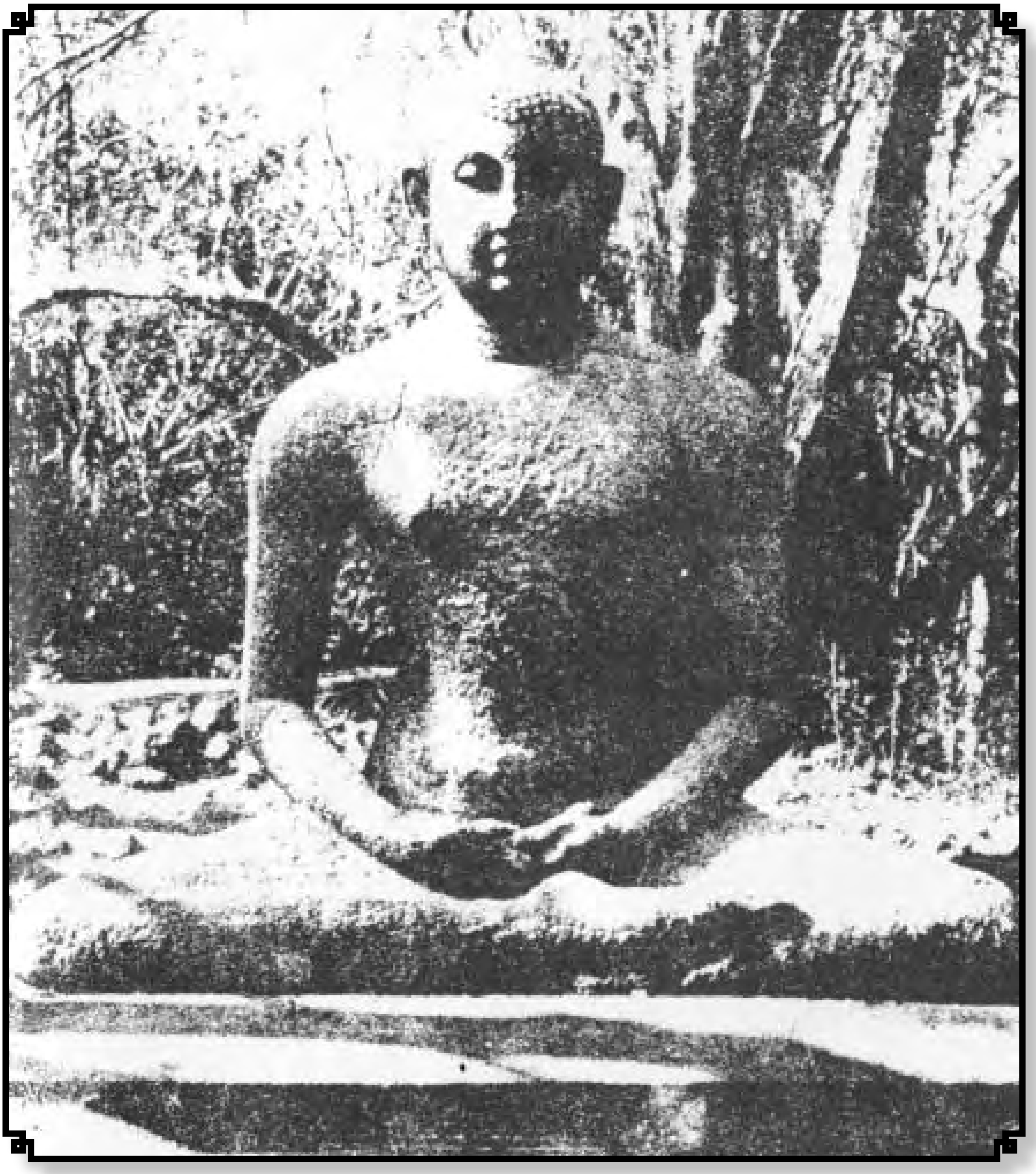
Buddha Statues presenting Abhaya (left: Sultanganji, Bihar) and Vitarka (right; Dong-Duong, Campā) Mudras (see p.160)



Dhyana and Patra Mudras—Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, India
(see p.160)



The Buddha in Samādhi Mudra—Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka (see p.161)



The Buddha in Samādhi Mudra—Toluvila, Sri Lanka (see p.161)



The Buddha—Mathura (see p.161)